

practical, concerned with the problems of modern life: the social, political, ecological, and above all the ordinary and familiar.

**THE WAY OF DIALOGUE**

Dialogue has to be described, experienced and developed as a lifestyle. As human beings we learned to speak. We talk, chatter, give and receive information, and have discussions – all this is not yet dialogue. Now and then, it happens that a deeper encounter arises out of our talking and our relationships, and an opening up of each, in more than intellectual terms, to the concerns of the other.

This is experienced by families and friends, and by those who share the same faiths or ideologies, but we are particularly concerned with the dialogue that reaches across differences of faith, ideology and culture, even where the partners in dialogue do not agree on important central aspects of human life.

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Dialogue can be recognised as a welcoming way of obedience to the commandment of the Decalogue, “you shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.” Dialogue helps us not to disfigure the image of our neighbours of different faiths and ideologies. It has been the experience of many Christians that this dialogue is indeed possible on the basis of a mutual trust and a respectful the integrity of each participant’s identity.

Dialogue, therefore, is a fundamental part of Christian service within community. In dialogue Christians actively respond to the command to, “love God and your neighbour as yourself.” As an expression of love, engagement in dialogue testifies to the experienced in Christ. With God’s love in our hearts we shall keep our identity in the pluralistic world and shall have peaceful dialogue with other faiths.

**Suggested Reading**

BEHR-SIGEL Elisabeth, *The Place of the Heart*. California, 1992.  
 LEMOPOULOS George, *You Shall be My Witnesses*. Caterini, 1995.  
 LOSSKY Vladimir, *In the Image and Likeness of God*. New York, 1979.  
 ROBERSON Ronald, *The Eastern Christian Churches*. Roma, 1995.  
 SUNG Bum Yun, *Ethics East and West*. Seoul, 1947.  
 YANNARAS Christos, *The Freedom of Morality*. New York, 1984.

**Nienke PRUIKSMA**

*Reconciliation and History: Psalm 103*

*Archbishop Desmond TUTU of South Africa writes in his book “No Future without Forgiveness”: “...my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in theirs (those we do not share a background with, who may even oppress us - NP). We belong in a bundle of life. We say ‘a person is a person through other people’. It is not ‘I think therefore I am’. It says rather: ‘I am human because I belong’. I participate, I share.” The chapter from which this quote is copied, describes a third way to deal with the trauma of a divided past: the way of Truth and Reconciliation, the way that was chosen in South Africa to start coming to terms with the legacy of apartheid. I will use the example of South Africa during this article several times as a reference for how in our time we can try and work reconciliation. Reconciliation is needed there where relations have gone awry – be it between people or between people and God – and realities are shattered.*

**ABOUT PSALM 103**

This Psalm is among those Psalms that are labelled as “hymns or descriptive praises” (N. K. GOTTWALD), as it begins and ends with blessing God. The body of the psalm cites “general and longstanding aspects of God’s goodness and power”. The verses above are the so-called body of Psalm 103 – I have left out the traditional opening and ending as they are less specific. Feel free to grab your own Bible and read the whole of the Psalm though, it always pays off to read the whole text, instead of some isolated verses.

Verse 6 tells us how God will act on behalf of those who cannot act for themselves, as God did for Israel when they were slaves in Egypt (verse 7). In verses 8 to 10 the psalmist tells us of God’s ways, how God relates to people, to then show us in comparative terms in verses 9-13 how they apply to people who fear God. Verse 14 is a prelude

to 15 and 16, showing that God knows of the temporary character of people’s lives. This temporariness is then emphasised by the everlastingness of God’s love in verse 14 – again the love for those who fear God, keep the covenant and remember the commandments.

**ON THE TEXT OF PSALM 103**

The Psalm uses quite some concepts that can give us a clearer idea of what reconciliation is all about, I will pick up some of them below. In verse 6 we find the word “oppressed”. Oppression is one of the main situations where reconciliation is most clearly needed. Where one person is more equal than the other, relationships go lopsided, and people cannot live to their full potential anymore – there is first of all a need for liberation (see the reference in verse 7 to Moses, referring to the Exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt), but what comes after that? To go back to South Africa, this meant that after Nelson MANDELA and many others who fought the apartheid regime were freed and free elections, that brought a landslide victory for the ANC, had been held, still things were not right. One of the first acts of the new parliament and government under president Mandela was to write a new constitution, which had an annex for the foundation of a *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (TRC). Members from this Commission came from all different groups in society: black, white, coloured, Indian, women, men, Muslims, Christians, Jews, pagans, lawyers, nurses, clerical people, etc. Archbishop Desmond TUTU was appointed as president. This firmly based the Commission in a religious context (too much according to some). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission travelled the whole of the country, heard the testimonies of oppressed and oppressors (and sometimes the distinctions were not even all that black and white). People told and learned truths, people were heard, people received amnesty, and people received



