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Preprint

W.G.B.M. Valkenberg & F.J.S. Wijzen (eds.), *The Polemical Dialogue: Research into Dialogue, Truth and Truthfulness* (Nijmegen Studies in Development and Cultural Change 24), Saarbrücken, Verlag für Entwicklungspolitik, 1997; 8 + 179 pp., DM 42,00, ISBN3-88156-695-3.

In May 1995, the Nijmegen research group on Intercultural Religious Dialogue organised a seminar for Ph.D. candidates on 'the polemical dialogue.' All contributions to the present volume were either papers presented at this seminar, or written during the preparation of the seminar. The authors are all in some way or other connected with the Nijmegen Faculty of Theology. As the editors admit in their introduction, the collection has become rather diverse. That is not to say that there is no coherence at all. One fundamental question emerges in different forms in all of the articles collected here: can dialogue and truth go together? If we are firmly convinced of the truth of our own beliefs, can we still have the required openness for the other? Most of the contributors do not feel at home with the propositional view of truth presupposed in these questions. Either they argue – with Wilhelm Dupré, who contributes a substantial article on 'Conflict, truth and dialogue' – that existential truth (the truth that 'becomes manifest in the unfolding of human existence' [22]) is not less important than propositional truth, or they give precedence to truthfulness and authenticity over truth. Both of these moves lead to the position that truth(fulness) is discovered in the dialogue rather than given in advance of it. There is another insight shared by most of the contributors. If truth is to be discovered indeed, dialogue cannot remain a purely intellectual enterprise. Interreligious dialogue can bear fruit only where people actually meet each other on a daily basis (47-48), and when the actual faith of ordinary people is taken into account (142-143). While this collection of articles succeeds in showing that the Western preoccupation with assessing propositional truth is one-sided and unsatisfactory, it fails to uncover and analyse the motives behind this preoccupation. In this connection, it is to be regretted that the contributors devote little attention to the aims of dialogue. If dialogue aims at a sophisticated form of syncretism – as is sometimes suggested in this volume – holding fast to the propositional truth of one's own position is much more problematic than if dialogue aims at mutual understanding, and possibly at a joint approach of some of the most urgent problems of our time.

Marcel Sarot