

# Self-acceptance

## *We cannot give away what we do not possess*

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### **Introduction**

The subject of this essay is to discuss the following quote from the book 'Love Yourself' by Walter Trobisch (1992, 15):

We cannot give what we do not possess. Only when we have accepted ourselves can we become truly self-less and free from ourselves. If, however, we have not found ourselves and discovered our own identity, then we must continually search for ourselves. The word 'self-centred' aptly describes us when we revolve only around ourselves.

Trobisch says that loving yourself is the same as accepting oneself. He argues that in Christianity we have a wrong image about self-love. We may not be self-centred and therefore we are not taking care of ourselves. Loving ourselves, he argues, is for many Christians the same as egoism. But Trobisch says that there is a difference between loving yourself and egoism. He says that loving yourself is the same as self-acceptance. He says that self-love has a double meaning, on one hand it can mean self-centeredness on the other hand it can mean self-acceptance. The first one, he argues, is negative. E.g. this is illustrated by the Greek myth of Narcissus who fell in love with his own reflection in the water, and while gazing at him self, he fell in the water and drowned. While the positive one, the self-acceptance, means the opposite of the self-centeredness meaning. That is accepting oneself as you are without falling in love with your own reflection.

### **Self-acceptance**

What is self-acceptance? Is it a process? Does self-acceptance occur in several gradations? Can we truly and fully accept ourselves? De Vries-Geervliet (2001, 50) says "The essential process of changing starts with the acceptance process of yourself

and mainly with your own feeling.”<sup>1</sup> According to De Vries-Geervliet self-acceptance is a process whereby it is important to accept your own feelings.

E.g. if you cannot accept that you are insecure than self-acceptance starts with accepting that you don't like to feel insecure. After you have accepted that you don't like to feel insecure you can start accepting yourself to be insecure.

So it is not only a process but there are also graduations of self-acceptance. It is not fully accepted or fully not accepted.

### **Which actors play a role in acceptance?**

I think there are different actors who play a role in accepting yourself. The first actor is your self. The people around you are also an actor. And the third actor is God. All those actors play a role in accepting yourself. And to make the process of self-acceptance more complicated the different actors are also linked together in their own self-acceptance. And as a Christian I believe that we live in a broken world and one area where this brokenness is visible is the area of self-acceptance. I think people can never fully accept themselves and others, only God accepts us fully. This does not mean that we don't accept others, but it means that we can not perfectly accept others and our self. However, people who do not accept themselves at all can not accept others. So before we can start accepting others we must start accepting ourselves. Does this mean that as soon as the process of accepting yourself starts you can accept others? The answer to this question is complicated. But as soon as one stage of the process is completed, e.g. someone does accept that he or she does not like to feel insecure then it is possible to start accepting other people because you accepted something in yourself.

### **Do we become truly free from ourselves if we have accepted ourselves?**

Free from ourselves does not mean that we have fixed the problem, or as Crabb (1992, 13) says, “When we probe beneath the surface of relationships into our attitudes toward ourselves and others, we discover that we tend to think of people (ourselves included) as little more than “useful things”, which sometimes get broken and need to

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<sup>1</sup> The quote is translated by me from Dutch to English. The Dutch book is to help social workers to change the life of other people. It is a book for counsellors. Therefore it deals with the process of changing, which I won't discuss in this essay because this essay is about self-acceptance before accepting others.

be fixed.” We notice something is wrong or broken and we try to fix the problem, we don’t accept ourselves with our problems. And we relate in the same way to other people. As soon as we accept that we ourselves are as we are, even if something seems to be broken and needs to be fixed. Then we can see that other people have problems and that these problems don’t need to be fixed but that they need acceptance. Our natural reaction is to fix those problems. I think that even today this is more the case because we live in a society where we can make everything perfect. We can make everything as we like and we can go everywhere. If we want we can live on the moon and as soon as we have a problem with relating to other people or to ourselves we want to fix this problem. We don’t accept the problem as it is. Even at school this is the case, students get taught about how to work in teams and how to make teams more efficient because we want to get most out of people. But we live in a broken world, people do harm to each other, people don’t relate well to each other. So there will be always problems with ourselves and with others and if we accept those problems, we can relate better to others because the problem doesn’t need to be fixed. So when we have accepted ourselves with our own problems we can become free from ourselves because we don’t have the need to fix our own problems.

**Do we have to search continually for ourselves if we did not discover our own identity?**

Trobisch assumes that if we did not accept ourselves we did not find our identity. He assumes that identity is the same as self-acceptance. One could argue against this<sup>2</sup> but I will assume that this is similar to each other or at least that if you have accepted yourselves you have also accepted your identity and this also works the other way round, if have found your identity you have accepted yourselves.

By searching ourselves Trobisch means searching for our identity, for our self-acceptance. But as a Christian we have an identity in Jesus. We are Christians, that is our identity and we are fully accepted by God. And we have to accept this fact, that we are accepted by God and that we have an identity in Him. As Trobisch (1992, 19) says, “We must learn to accept acceptance.” That means that we have to learn that we are accepted, that someone loves us. That someone likes us as how we are. This is not

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<sup>2</sup> I take this for granted because of the limited word count of this essay.

only true for the fact that God fully accepts us, but also in receiving acceptance from other people.

### **Acceptance as a need**

I think everybody has a need for acceptance. Many people grow up with acceptance from their parents, family and friends. And I think everybody wants to be accepted, everybody has a need to be accepted. If this need is not fulfilled we want to fulfil this need when we try to accept others. To accept others is then a form of acquiring acceptance. As Trobisch (1992, 9) says, "...if on the one hand self-acceptance is the foundation of all existence and if on the other hand nobody is born with the ability to accept and love oneself., we face a real challenge." So we have to learn to accept before we have a reason to exist. And we learn this by being accepted by others and by God.

Krans (2000, 41) says that in communication self-acceptance is important. "For every human being it is important that he may exist as he is. Our self-respect increases if we see that we are accepted..."<sup>3</sup>

### **Conclusion**

We must accept ourselves and we must learn to accept acceptance. If we do not accept ourselves then we don't possess acceptance. If we don't possess acceptance we cannot give acceptance because when we try to accept others we are actually acquiring acceptance for ourselves. However in my opinion self-acceptance, is not something you have or you don't have. It occurs in graduations and only God fully accepts us as we are. If we did not accept ourselves at all we have to work on that before we can accept other people. And by not accepting ourselves I mean that you don't feel accepted by God or others. We can only give acceptance if we received acceptance.

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<sup>3</sup> The quote is translated by me from Dutch to English. The book describe how to communication works between people from different cultures.

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