

F.L.C. Notes – April 22, 2017

“A person’s ability to love is unlocked when that person experiences himself or herself as good, worthwhile and lovable.” As a continuation of our interest in promoting some of the insights of the Sisters of Life (see previous “F.L.C. Notes – February 24, 2017 and Sr. Mary Elizabeth’s talk at www.4life4family.org/2-14-14), we enclose information on the work of psychiatrist Dr. Conrad Baars on **affirmation**. His writings are included in the formation program of the sisters. A good introductory book is Born Only Once – the miracle of affirmation by Conrad W. Baars, MD. For more information, see: www.baarsinstitute.com

“True Compassion sees the gift and value of the other, especially in the face of illness or frailty.” This is the theme of the Spring 2017 publication of Sisters of Life, “Imprint”. One particularly powerful witness of this put into loving practice is that of Dr. Michael Brescia, Executive Medical Director and co-founder of Calvary Hospital in the Bronx. We enclose the recent “Imprint” interview of Dr. Brescia. A free copy of the entire Spring 2017 issue on pain, suffering and palliative care can be obtained by calling the Sisters of Life Motherhouse: 845-357-3547. Just ask for the Spring 2017 issue. An electronic version may also be available soon at their website where you can also download previous issues: <http://www.sistersoflife.org/newsletters>

Thank you for promoting these ideas and materials widely!

30 Years!

Family Life Council

*Promoting the Church’s Teaching on
Life and Family - locally, nationally
and internationally*

1987 – 2017

“God has sent the Family to be
His Love!” - St. Teresa of Calcutta



“We will stand up and
proclaim that no one ever
has the authority to destroy
unborn life!”
– Pope St. John Paul II

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Affirmation

All human beings have an intrinsic need for human love. With the exception of divine intervention, it is essential to receive human love in order for a person to feel good, worthwhile, and lovable – as well as to possess the capacity to love others. In essence, we must first ***be loved*** in order ***to love***.

A person's ability to love is unlocked when that person experiences himself or herself as good, worthwhile, and lovable. According to Christian psychiatrists Conrad W. Baars and Anna A. Terruwe, this process is called "affirmation." Affirmation is a three-step process which occurs when one person is the source of unconditional love and emotional strengthening for another person. These three steps are: the person is *open and receptive* to the goodness and loveliness of the other; over time, the person allows himself to *be moved* with affection, love, delight, etc., by the other person; and third, the person *reveals* these feelings to the other primarily through his countenance, tone of voice, gentle touch, etc.

For Christians, this capacity to love is essential in order to live out the commandment of Jesus to "love one another" (John 13:34, 15:12). However, affirmation and affirming living – being open to the goodness, truth and beauty of others, nature, the fine arts, etc. – all of creation – is not limited to Christians. It is simply the nature of every human person to desire to experience happiness in this manner.

According to Drs. Baars and Terruwe, a person is unaffirmed when he or she has been deprived of authentic affirmation through having been criticized, ignored, neglected, abused, abandoned or emotionally rejected by primary caregivers early in life, resulting in a stunted emotional life. Because affirmation of one's being is an essential developmental need, unaffirmed individuals are incapable of developing into emotionally mature adults without first receiving authentic affirmation from another person. Maturity is reached when there is a harmonious relationship between a person's body, mind, emotions, and soul under the guidance of their reason and will.

Affirmation Therapy

Affirmation therapy involves the therapist's ***affective***, rather than ***effective***, presence with a client. In other words, it is a way of "*being*" with a person as opposed to "*doing*" something to or for her. Affirmation therapy can be formally described as a way of being affectively present to another human person in a therapeutic relationship in which the therapist reveals to the client his or her intrinsic goodness and worth. Affirmation is a profound way of *being* with someone that should not be mistaken for a set of simplistic techniques such as giving a pat on the back or a superficial compliment. Any ancillary actions or interventions on the part of the therapist are secondary to the therapist's affective presence and are only healing in the context of the accepting and safe environment created by the therapist's affective presence.

The authentic care, concern, and love for the adult who internally experiences the world as does a baby or child is communicated by the therapist through the therapist's eyes, facial expression, countenance and other nonverbal communication, as well as words of acceptance and encouragement. The therapist's affective presence allows the client to *feel* accepted, loved and worthwhile instead of simply trying to believe it *intellectually*, based on the words of the therapist. As the client accepts affirmation from the therapist, emotional strengthening occurs naturally at the client's own pace. The client is able to grow stronger as she feels safe and secure with someone who knows and accepts her just as she is.

In Affirmation therapy, the therapeutic relationship involves listening and reflecting on the unaffirmed person's life experiences, emotions, irrational fears and anxieties, as well as an exploration of the past as it relates to the current symptomatology of the client. Throughout this exploration, the therapist remains affectively present, explaining moral truths according to the capacity and belief system of the client, and correcting or clarifying false beliefs harbored by the client. It is this affirming 'milieu' that fosters the client's emotional and intellectual growth and integration and allows the client's symptoms to be outgrown gradually, as the course of development can resume.

Even though there are no "techniques" which are specifically associated with affirmation therapy, various strategies grounded in Christian anthropology are used by the therapist:

- Early relationships between the client and his or her parents and significant others are explored as necessary in order to understand the extent of affirmation that the client has received and any other factors that may affect healing.
- The therapist teaches the client about the emotional life, particularly emphasizing the importance of accepting the goodness of all of one's emotions and that they are even a support for the life of virtue (per Aquinas), and necessary to psychological wholeness.
- The therapist gently guides and encourages the client's emotional growth in a way that fosters a mature understanding of the emotional life and allows for an increased awareness and healthy integration of feelings and emotions with reason and will.
- The therapist pays close attention to the areas in which the client feels badly about himself or herself, inferior to others, distressed or discouraged, and aids the client to see the fallacy of any erroneous or irrational beliefs.
- If it is determined that a repressive disorder such as an anxiety disorder, sexual repression, scrupulosity or obsessive-compulsive repression is part of the client's condition, we refer the therapist to the in-depth discussion and guidelines in *Psychic Wholeness and Healing* for proper therapy of these repressive disorders, including mortification therapy of sexual obsessions and compulsions.² See also *Feeling & Healing Your Emotions* for an extensive discussion of the healthy emotional life.³

These books demonstrate that there is hope for healing these very difficult disorders through an understanding of the emotional life based in the Christian anthropology of St. Thomas Aquinas.

1. Baars, Conrad W. and Anna A. Terruwe. *Healing the Unaffirmed*, Rev. ed. Suzanne M. Baars and Bonnie N. Shayne (eds.). Staten Island, NY: ST PAULS/Alba House, 2002. pp. 2-3. [Back to text](#)

2. Terruwe, Anna A. & Conrad W. Baars. *Psychic Wholeness and Healing*. Staten Island, NY: Alba House 1981, p. 33. [Back to text](#)

3. Baars, Conrad W. *Feeling & Healing Your Emotions*. Rev. ed. Suzanne M. Baars and Bonnie N. Shayne (eds.). Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1979. Gainesville, FL: Bridge-Logos, 2003. [Back to text](#)