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# Psychic Wholeness and Healing for the Family

Dr. Conrad W. Baars

*This talk, given by Dr. Baars at the October, 1981 meeting of the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds, is being published posthumously. Dr. Baars died of a heart attack approximately two weeks after the talk was given.*

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## Introductory Comments by Msgr. William Martin

Dr. Baars was born in Rotterdam, Netherlands, and studied at Oxford University, among other places. During World War II, he served in the Royal Dutch Army and was active in Dutch and French resistance movements until captured by the Nazis. He spent two years in French prisons and Buchenwald concentration camp until liberated by General Patton's Third Army. He received the Croix du Combattant de l'Europe.

Dr. Baars served as advisor to the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy and consultant to the 1971 Vatican Synod of Bishops on problems of the priesthood. He specialized in the diagnosis and treatment of persons with obsessive-compulsive neurosis, deprivation neurosis and other emotional disorders. He collaborated on a number of books with Anna Terruwe whose work Pope Paul VI described as a "gift to the Church." Dr. Baars authored *Born Only Once* and *Feeling and Healing Your Emotions*, among other books. He participated in various aspects of the healing ministry and engaged in research aimed at the integration of spiritual healing and psychiatric therapy.

Doctor Baars was the 1980 recipient of the Christian Culture Award, bestowed annually by Assumption University, Windsor, Ontario, on outstanding lay exponents of Christian ideals.

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I think that, after my talk, most of us will have different ideas on the subject of affirmation, which is very profound. I titled it "Psychic Wholeness and Healing for the Family." It is a subject which is not taught in medical school. Families are not necessarily sick. And yet it

is a topic which was brought up this afternoon — a subject which pertains to all of us because as Christians, we all have to be like Christ, Who was the first Affirmer, the first Healer of mankind.

This process of healing is one which, in its essence, completes the biological process of bringing a child into life. It is a process which I have called the “second birth” or the “psychic birth” of the child, a much more difficult process than the physical delivery of a child because it involves the efforts of at least two persons — the father and the mother. It is something which some parents do spontaneously and naturally, because they were given this gift by their parents, while others who were never given this gift are not able to do this, or only to a limited extent. Yet there is much that can be done to learn what is necessary to be a true, authentic affirmer of other persons. “Affirmer” here means “healer” — someone who reveals to another his or her own goodness, worth, lovableness, and opens him to his or her own goodness. As a result, that person can, in turn, become an affirmer, a revealer of the good of other human beings. In fact, it is a necessary process if that person is able to become open to his own goodness, the goodness of creation and the goodness of God.

I introduced this term in 1950 when I translated some of the books by Dr. Anna Terruwe, my colleague in the Netherlands. It's a psychological term — affirmation, affirming living — which we have taken from Luke 22:32, where Jesus speaks to the apostles and admonishes them to become, like He had been to them, “a strengthener of their brothers.” His actual words were: “Now you in turn must strengthen your brothers.”

So I am going to talk about the essence of healing, the psychological essence of healing, a beautiful concept, a profound concept, something I never learned in my training as a psychiatrist — a secular, humanistic training. In fact, if I had not discovered the work of Dr. Terruwe, I would have left my profession in 1957-58 because I realized I was not getting anywhere in bringing about true healing, “healing that is more than curing,” as Dr. Bernard Klamecki called it.

To explain this process of affirmation, I would like to note what happens to our children when we do not affirm them or, even worse, when we do the opposite — when we deny our children, or when we pseudo-affirm them. First of all, when we do not affirm our children or open them to the goodness of themselves, they will never have the sense of feeling good, worthwhile, loved for themselves, loved because they exist, not for anything that they have done or what they do. In other words, their emotional life never develops.

If a mother and a father are unable to affirm the child from the day of its physical birth, that child will grow up and become an adolescent, then an adult, who will still have the feelings and the emotional life of an infant. If the mother and father are able to do it for a couple of months, a couple of years, then they are going to live as adults with

the emotional life, the feelings, of a child all their lives, so they feel unloved, unwanted, lonely, helpless. There are many ways people can be helpless — not being able to develop friendships, for instance, or not being able to succeed in marriage even though they can easily succeed in professions and business where they do not need that many feelings — or any feelings at all; where they have to make cold, calculated, rational decisions. Feelings of uncertainty and insecurity are always present in such people. There are no feelings to back up their decisions, their actions. They may know what they should do, but like healthy people, there are no feelings to tell them, no psychic motors (in other words, emotions) to tell them, “What you are doing, what you have decided on, is right.” They can only live by their thinking processes and their will: “I decide to do this or that.”

### Uncertain, Insecure, Need Approval

When they go out to buy clothing for themselves — a necktie, a gift for their spouse or children — they are like a child. They don't know what to buy, so they worry what others will think of them: “Have I made the right decision?” Thus they are always uncertain, insecure, in need of the approval of other human beings.

At the optometrist's office recently, there was a pretty young lady, a professional, who was very anxious to choose glass frames. She asked the saleslady, “Is this right? Is this good? What do you think of those colors?” There were no feelings in her to tell her, “I like this and I am going to buy it for myself.” She needed to ask other people whom she probably would never see again. That is the way unaffirmed people always are. They have a great need to be loved because they never have felt unconditional love. They want to be loved by everyone!

When I ask a patient if there are some persons who don't like him and he says, “No, everybody loves me,” I am often inclined to inquire, “Then why are you here? You're very depressed.” These patients say, “Everybody loves me.”

They have become masters in many ways of befriending people very superficially and then thinking those people like them because they never get angry. So they do everything possible to appease other persons — never disagree, never say no, never assert themselves, never antagonize others.

A very interesting case involved an older man whom I met only in the last two months of his life, because of a very serious depression. He was found to have inoperable cancer. He went to the hospital and was told he did not have long to live.

The pastor visited and said to him, “John, you know that you have

inoperable cancer. Would it be all right if I helped you to prepare to meet your Maker?"

When the patient said yes, the pastor asked, "John, are you ready to renounce Satan and all his works?"

And this severely unaffirmed person, this deprivation neurotic, devoid of love all his life, pondered and said, "Father, I cannot do that. I am in no condition to antagonize anyone!"

The story is tragic, but that is how those people are: "I must please everyone. I am nobody. My existence depends on you." They seek love from everyone and never find love from anyone. They go out of their way to please, to buy gifts for the doctor, for other persons. They are careful never to hurt another person's feelings.

If we realize how many people in our society go by the pseudo-Christian principle of trying so hard not to hurt people's feelings, we see how widespread this disorder is, this state of psychic weakness in our society. I said "pseudo-Christian" because it is not Christian to go out of our way not to hurt another person's feelings. Christ hurt a lot of people's feelings. As the result of that, He was put to death. And yet we think we are real Christians when we try so hard not to hurt people's feelings. It typifies the fear of another person not loving us, of becoming angry at us. Because a person is helpless, he wants to be loved. Such persons can't stand their own anger. They are afraid of the anger of others and they always feel inferior and inadequate.

Now just think of your children with all those basic symptoms which I mentioned. Basically, it is not a grownup emotional life, always to feel insecure and uncertain, inferior and inadequate, having a great fear of the world because one sees oneself as a child among adults.

I am talking about your children, my children, in their late teens or 20s, surrounded by what appear to be adults, fearful all the time, never leading their own lives. Sooner or later they become depressed (the main symptom of being unaffirmed), obviously because they do not live their own lives.

Many suicides are attempted by the persons who have never been adequately affirmed. Some of those people will try to take things into their own hands and they will try to affirm themselves. This is very unfortunate because no one can effectively affirm himself. It is always futile. One can only be affirmed, can only receive the gift of himself from another person. One cannot give that to himself.

People who do this are not as passive as deprivation neurotics (the most serious kind of unaffirmed persons) who have more energy, who may be in fortunate circumstances, who will try to show other persons that they are truly important, that they are worthwhile, that they are at least equal to other persons. Or they can do it by excelling in the business world, the professional world, in the hierarchy. It is often true that the more successful persons are in these areas and other

fields, the more likely they are to be inadequate or unaffirmed persons. It is nothing to be ashamed of because those persons had no choice in the matter. One cannot choose his own affirmed and affirming parents.

Other people will do it by obtaining power. We see many unaffirmed persons in politics, in prisons, in concentration camps where they have power over the life and death of other human beings. Some persons become famous and have people all over the world adoring them because of their beauty or other factors. Thus we see many unaffirmed persons in the entertainment world. Marilyn Monroe was one of them who committed suicide. Adolph Hitler was another who sought power and committed suicide. He never succeeded; he got to the top, looked around and said, "I still feel that I'm nobody. I'm not happy."

Since I practiced for more than 20 years in Rochester, Minn., where the Mayo Clinic is, I have seen many famous doctors as well as wives and children of doctors. The doctors came to me saying, "I feel so depressed, so worthless."

In the beginning, when I didn't know about this, I thought, "How is this possible? Everybody knows you. Look at what you have done. You're the most famous surgeon in the world" or whatever it might have been. I realized, of course, that this was not the answer. These were the unaffirmed persons who did not feel worthwhile. They had done a lot of things, and they knew that they were worthwhile as far as doing things was concerned.

People try to affirm themselves by getting status symbols. I know a priest who got three M.A.'s and later a Ph.D. He put those behind his name. Then he got a degree from out of the country and he also put that behind his name. That was a giveaway.

### Affirmation in Sex

Of course, the most popular way to affirm oneself is in sex, especially when one confuses sex and love. That is where people try to find that there is somebody who loves them. And again, one can never find affirmation in that unless there is already a healthy, mutually affirming relationship. That is one of the reasons — because of the great numbers of unaffirmed people in our society — why it was possible that we did away with ages of pro-life, and it was possible that people demanded abortions because they could not admit that they could not love, that they were loved, that they were not able to love other persons. So abortion became the answer because sex was necessary. Sex, in a way, is necessary for the unaffirmed people in life because they want to feel loved. That is why younger and younger

children engage in sex, and younger and younger children become pregnant, many of whom at the age of nine or ten say, "I don't want to have an abortion because I want to have one person for myself. That's my child. And that child is going to love me." Then they don't want to give it up for adoption.

So what is happening in our increasingly unaffirmed world with people who cannot affirm other human beings is a great tragedy. This explains the increased violence in teenagers. I think lately there is a lot of talk on television about "Why are there so many young kids engaged in violence?"

When one is not affirmed, one perceives the persons who should have affirmed him as enemies, who have deprived him of the most important gratification, one of the most important needs that a person has — to feel worthwhile as a human being. These people see their parents as their enemies, and they will even take it out on their parents or other authority figures.

There is so much crime in our world, so much corruption and so many scandals in high offices, because those people are psychologically weak. What is worse is that in many cases persons lose their faith because when we get psychically weak Christians whose task it is to provide guidance, they are not capable of defending the good, defending the Church, or opposing evil. One of the reasons we have a vocation crisis is that there is so much psychic weakness in our society in general, and priests and sisters come from the same society and are often psychically weak and affected in this way, especially the young priest and the young sister. It is not any fault of theirs. They are not capable psychically of inspiring young boys and girls to become priests and sisters.

Now how do I affirm? How do you affirm? This is the most basic process to which we are called by God. First of all, we do not learn it by listening to the pop psychologists — people who write books like *How to Look Out for Number One*, *Looking Out for Number One*, *How to be Healthy*, etc., or to the pseudo-affirmed whom we see in so many professions as counselors, again with the best intentions. But they have misunderstood what "affirming" and "affirmation" really mean.

It took me many years to understand this, and Dr. Terruwe first explained it to me after she had discovered this whole new neurotic syndrome of deprivation neurosis — a syndrome in people who have never repressed any emotion but who have become unaffirmed human beings because another person did not give them, as a present, their own selves. When I would go back (about every two years since 1946 when I came to this country), I found myself asking Dr. Terruwe, "Now what do you really mean by 'affirming'? I thought I understood it in the beginning." Each time, she would explain it to me again in different ways.

What I have noticed during my many years of lecturing throughout the country is that most people have come to see affirmation as a method or technique, as something that you do. They have begun "doing" affirming. But affirmation is something that you are. I think that maybe because I have chosen that one word, "affirmation," I have aided in this process of making people believe that all they have to do to be affirmers is apply a method or technique, because in the English language, most words that end in "ation" suggest doing something: "celebration," "communication," "dedication," "consecration."

Several years ago I gave a lecture series at Oral Roberts University, and I spoke on this subject to explain that affirmation is something that you are and not something that you do. Several months later, I heard from someone who attended, who said, "Doctor, I have often thought about what you said about affirmation and words ending in '-ation,' suggesting activity, but I found one word that is an exception and I thought you would like to know it. It's the word 'constipation.'" It's often good for you to think about it. You think about "affirmation," go back to "constipation," just to remind yourself: "Am I actually an affirmer of other human beings? Am I doing too much?"

### True Affirmer Leads Affirming Life

The true, authentic affirmer of other human beings is the person who leads the affirming life, just like Jesus did. Those are the people who are always present to everything that is. And affirmation is not just limited to other human beings, but also to water, to food, to whatever God has created.

Normally we are present to things solely and predominantly with our *ratio*, our reason, our working minds, our discursive minds which form ideas, which think, judge, compare, etc. — the working mind. But in order to be present to all that is, we have to use primarily this intuitive intellect, actually the source of the soul, over our heart, while the *ratio* is our mind.

Second, we need the capacity to be moved emotionally by that to which we are present. This means we have to be gifted with a totally developed emotional life, where all the psychic motors which God has put in are alive, are capable of reacting to whatever stimuli come in. This is something which is not true for the majority of our society, especially Christians, because we have been taught many untruths by Christian people about the importance, the significance of our emotional lives which God has created.

Third, it is necessary that we allow this being moved emotionally to be revealed to others. Here I am talking about the normal, physiolog-



ical component of every emotion, every physiological change that takes place. We see it; we all know what develops in a person who gets angry. We see all the changes in his face, in his body. We can feel the heart race with intense fear, with every emotion that God has given us. When we feel it, it is accompanied by physiological changes.

I am saying that we have to have the courage and the maturity to let those changes take place, so that another person to whom we are present can observe what we feel. When we are present to his goodness and are moved to his goodness and maybe also feel sad because he is sick, we feel compassion and that person feels our compassion. When another person comes to realize that one feels joy through his goodness, he comes to the awareness that "I am a good person. I am lovable." He may know this from other sources. He may know that God loves us all, but if he only has the knowledge, he has only a partial truth. He only becomes mature, he only experiences psychic birth when someone else opens him to the fact: "You are lovable for existing." And anything else one does after that — help one gives, words of consolation, of love, of affirmation — all that is secondary.

In fact, one can do all those things that the pseudo-affirmers do without ever having been present, without having been moved by the goodness of another person. That is the pseudo-affirmer, the one who likes to do things with good intentions, but who doesn't take the time, doesn't have the time to affirm, to be, and that is what we have to learn ourselves.

The second part of true, authentic affirmation is intellectual affirmation. Every human being has a need to know the truth — natural truth, moral truth — so he can make himself strong by applying this knowledge to his own human being. That means that the true affirmer of another person also has to be able and capable, and to know when to correct, when to punish, when to teach and when to admonish.

Before Vatican II, before World War II, there was plenty of intellectual affirmation in the Church and in the schools. There was very little emotional affirmation because Christian people have always lived with suspicion and fear toward their emotional life. We have never understood why God gave us an emotional life. Now things have, in a way, turned around. There is much intellectual weakness, as we can see in the schools. We can see even in our Church, moral theologians who, trying to help unaffirmed people, have lowered their moral standards because they think people are so weak they cannot live up to what the Magisterium teaches. So are we going to help them by teaching the lower moral standards? The most infamous among Catholic publications is the book *Human Sexuality*, written by five theologians.

But the whole problem has not quite turned around. With all the pseudo-affirmation that goes on, people are still emotionally weak because they are not truly strengthened in the way I have just

described. They don't develop neurosis. They now become psychically weak, psychologically weak, because they spoil themselves from an early age. They gratify all their sensual desires and feelings as early as possible. That also brings about weakness. In fact, I think it is the kind of weakness that is going to be even more difficult to cure, to heal, than the obsessive-compulsive neurosis has ever been.

One of my patients recalled an incident when he was five or six years old. He was home with his mother, and the pastor came to visit. Johnny, who was shy, hid under the table. This was in Holland and since most tables there have small Oriental rugs over them, it was easy for a child to hide.

Most of us who don't know too much about affirmation would say that the affirming thing was to encourage Johnny to come out. But this truly mature, affirming mother and the pastor paid no attention to Johnny and let him sit there for half an hour until the pastor left.

Then, when Johnny came out from under the table and went up to his mother, all she said was, "Were you shy, Johnny?"

That is affirmation, because she said, "You may be who you are. You may be shy. You're at the age to be shy. You don't have to grow up in a hurry. I love you just the way you are." That is affirmation.

I can give you many examples of other living people, for instance, Mother Teresa. It is not what she does, but what she is to the human beings for whom she cares — the lepers and all the other outcasts from society. And Pope John XXIII was a tremendous example of a person who lived the affirming life.

A beautiful example is described in a book about John Paul II. One of our papers in San Antonio carried a cartoon (in 1979, when he was traveling to Poland), which showed Pope John Paul II by himself, apparently running very fast with a big smile on his face, toward the people in Poland whom he loved so much. He showed his feelings — his joy, his happiness. At the same time, we saw in his left hand, the staff that hits the face of a Marxist, indicated here by a hammer and sickle. That is the intellectual affirmation of Pope John Paul II, who always teaches the truth which often is not popular — one of the most graphic demonstrations ever seen of intellectual and emotional affirmation, the strengthening of other human beings.

### Go to Bible, Scriptures

With this knowledge about affirmation and growth, one should go to the Bible, to the scriptures, to start to see the life of Jesus in a totally different light — a richer way of life.

For example, there is the story of Saul on the road to Damascus to persecute the Christians. Suddenly there is a light, and he and his followers fall to the ground. Saul hears the voice saying, "Saul, Saul,

why do you persecute me?"

And Saul asks, "Who are you, sir?"

And He says, "I am Jesus, Whom you are persecuting."

Just imagine: if I were being persecuted and saw my persecutor there, I would say different things. I would be indignant if he dared to persecute me, who am so good. But there was Jesus. He showed concern for Paul (for Saul at that time). "You make it so hard for yourself. You go to all this trouble." And immediately Saul was converted by this tremendous affirmation of Jesus, and said, "Tell me Lord, what can I do? What should I do?"

Toward the end of His public life, Jesus said to Peter, "You are the rock." He didn't say, "You must be a rock. You should be a rock." He said, "You *are* the rock." And Peter knew that Jesus always spoke the truth. He must have been startled. "He sees features in me that I don't know about." Imagine what this must have done to him, what strength it called forth that Jesus already saw, and what true affirmers of others always call forth and disclose appropriately to other human beings.

Next He said, "I will entrust you with the keys to the kingdom of heaven," that is, "I will give you the keys by which you will open the hearts of other human beings, your brothers, just as I have opened your heart in the three years that we have been together. See what has happened to you. You have become strong men. I am going to make you the first bishops, the first pope. Say those things that are called for, the work of affirmation."

Then, in a completely different scene, where He addressed the crowds and the Scribes and Pharisees, He spoke those words of affirmation very briefly: "Woe to you, you frauds! You blind guides! You blind fools! You viper's nest!" These were words of affirmation. We would never do it because it would hurt other people's feelings. But Jesus knew that He hurt their feelings. He got their attention in one of His last attempts to teach the truth to the Scribes and Pharisees — necessary words.

I think the most startling example in the New Testament was when, on the last day of His life, Jesus called the Apostles together and told them that it was soon going to end. He would be taken to court, would be tortured, would die on a cross. And Peter took Him aside and, in his love for Jesus said, "May you be spared, Master. God forbid that any such thing ever happen to you."

Then Jesus spoke words to Peter which I never understood until I understood more about affirmation. He said, "Get out of my sight, you Satan. You are trying to make me trip and fall. You are not judging by God's standards, but by man's." Words of love, affirmation — strong words, calling him "Satan." Peter had to learn, like all of us have to learn, that even when we love a person very deeply it

doesn't necessarily follow that what we do is going to be right. Other knowledge has to be taken into consideration, so Jesus had to get Peter's attention. Peter must have been very startled, just having been told, "You are a rock," and now hearing, "You're Satan." I think Peter learned a lesson because Jesus said, "You judge not by God's standards, but by man's."

That is why Jesus had to go to the garden where the apostles fell asleep. It was late and they were tired, but also, they had nothing to offer in terms of affirmation to Jesus.

Only the Father could affirm Jesus at that terrible moment in His life. He sent the angel and strengthened Jesus through the angel so that He became calm and had the strength to go on with His terrible suffering.

From this presentation on a very profound subject, I hope it has become evident how important it is that all of us, not only doctors, should become like Christ and learn to live an affirming life. The doctor has, of course, the task of healing his patients, but also of bringing this fundamental, psychic healing to his wife and children, especially to the children so that they in turn become revealers of the goodness of other human beings, have inner strength and are psychically healthy and whole persons.

That is what the world needs. We are in the very best state of prayer from the psychological point of view in our society because we have an increasing number of psychically weak persons. I think that we, as doctors, have a tremendous task to bring about this psychic strength in our society.

I don't think the psychiatrist has the first duty to bring about this teaching. I think it is the Church which should and, I am quite sure, will teach this.

Dr. Terruwe and I had the fortunate opportunity in 1971 at the Synod of Bishops to talk for two and a half hours to Bishop Wojtyla who had a profound understanding of all this that we have discovered psychologically. I think now that he is Pope, it is evident that he is going to teach all Christians to become what he already is and what they should become.

That way, we will prevent psychic illness and emotional illness because the neuroses are purely man-made disorders. There is no need for any person to be neurotic! Other people make us neurotic because we are weak. By our approach, by our teachings as Christians, we have made other persons neurotic. In the name of Christianity, people have become scrupulous persons and energy neurotics who ultimately led to the deprivation neurotic, the unaffirmed person, because in this whole process for generations, for centuries, our emotional life has been stifled, has been repressed and suppressed, so that the person's capacity to love, to be joyful, to have compassion, to be friendly, to

be tender, to be kind, has suffered and often disappeared. Everything is done by thinking, by reasoning and by being willing to do it which is, of course, primary.

### God Knew What He Did

But God knew what He did when He also created in us the emotional life. God gave us psychic motors for a very definite purpose — to help us, to make our life easier, to make our life worthwhile and unfortunately, because of many factors in the past, we have not believed this. We have become fearful and suspicious of our emotional life.

Psychiatrists, of course, should play a very important role. Unfortunately, they have not yet discovered it, at least not in this wide aspect that I have described and presented in the various books I have written. That is not strange because, by and large, the psychiatric profession is secular-humanistic. It does not recognize — or at least does not teach or involve — the spiritual dimension of man.

There are, of course, many exceptions, like Catholic or Christian psychiatrists, but they are a very small percentage of the total profession. That is why I was so desperate, after some years of praying, because I knew that the spiritual dimension is part of the psyche. It has to be brought to bear. It has to be involved in any therapy.

Now if you are confused about what affirmation is, I will be very happy. Begin to think about it. I made a mistake. When I first heard about it, I thought I knew it. It took me many, many years to learn about it. I still don't think I have exhausted the whole topic. I am still learning, especially from my patients. I see some of them with tremendous insight, tremendous sensitivity, severe neurotics, unaffirmed people. They suffer much more than I ever did in concentration camps, prison or whatever.

We learn all the time by being present with our whole being to our patients, to our spouse, to our children, to other human beings. This, of course, involves many other changes that we have to make in life. We have to be less busy, think less, listen less to all the turmoil in the world. We have to *be* more — more quiet, have more time for meditation and contemplation, more time to be alone, and more time to be by ourselves.