

***Chastity as the Fruit of “Genuine Affirmation”:  
Reflections on the Work of Anna Terruwe, Conrad Baars and John Paul II***<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:**

This paper was written, in part, as a response to another conference paper, *Pornography and the Communion of Persons*, by Whitney Jacobs. Before John Paul II’s election to the papacy, Catholic psychiatrists Anna Terruwe and Conrad Baars already had written on “affirmation” as a fundamental human need and that the crucial psychological, moral and spiritual crisis of our time was the lack of genuine affirmation being given to, and received by, modern youth. Just before Baars died 1981, Terruwe and Baars dedicated their last two books (*Feeling and Healing Your Emotions* and *Psychic Wholeness and Healing*) to Pope John Paul II, whom Baars described as “an excellent example of affirming living.”

The present paper reviews Terruwe and Baars’ understanding of the nature of genuine affirmation and the consequences for individuals and societies when persons are un-affirmed or disaffirmed. The affirming person and writings of John Paul II, especially his *Letter to Families*, are discussed, and parallels are drawn between his work and that of Terruwe and Baars. An understanding of unchaste behavior- including the use of pornography- as *pseudo*-self-affirming behavior is explored, as is growth in chastity as the fruit of genuine affirmation. Ways in which chastity may be taught and unchastity may be prevented or remedied, through genuine affirmation, also are considered, in light of John Paul II’s writings, the Pontifical Council on the Family’s *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, and the pastoral and therapeutic wisdom found in the Courage ministry, 12 Step groups, and the fatherhood movements.

**Introduction**

This paper is both a short paper in itself and a response to Whitney Jacob’s paper. My paper began as an abstract submitted in response to the Spring call for papers for this 2004 conference of the *Fellowship of Catholic Scholars* which celebrates “The International Year of the Family” and the tenth anniversary of John Paul II’s 1994 *Letter to Families*. I had proposed a paper entitled: *Genuine Affirmation: Sine-qua-non for “Raising Catholic (or any) Children in a Secular Culture”*. I intended to discuss parenting in light of the concept of “affirmation” as taught and practiced *explicitly* by Catholic psychiatrists Anna Terruwe and Conrad Baars and *implicitly* through the presence and teaching of John Paul II, especially in *Letter to Families*. Subsequently, I was invited to be the chair and first respondent for one of the concurrent paper sessions entitled: *Psychological Insights and the Dignity of the Person and the Role of Parents*, during which Mr. Jacob’s paper on *Pornography and the Community of Persons* and a second paper were to be read. Over the

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented, in part, at the Convention of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars, September 2004, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, and is published in the conference proceedings: Kenneth D. Whitehead (ed.), *The Church, Marriage and the Family*(South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine’s Press, 2007), p 173-196.

course of the summer, two different presenters initially accepted but later had to decline the opportunity to offer their paper. So, a few weeks ago, Msgr. Swetland asked if I would present a paper as well as offer a response to Mr. Jacobs paper.

In agreeing to do so, I decided to write on the concept of affirmation with a focus on its relation to chastity and the problem of pornography use and other unchaste behaviors. Part I of my paper discusses the concept of “genuine affirmation” in the work of Baars and Terruwe, while Part II reveals how the person, presence and writing of John Paul II, specifically his *Letter to Families*, offer excellent examples of “affirming living.” In Part III, I discuss the consequences for individuals who have been poorly affirmed or even disaffirmed as persons of worth and dignity. I explore how the need to compensate for insufficient affirmation may motivate unchaste behavior, including the use of pornography, as *pseudo*-self-affirmation and inauthentic self-denial. Finally, in Part IV, I reflect on how chastity may be taught as the fruit of genuine affirmation and how compulsive participation in pornography- or any unchaste behavior- may be remedied- or prevented- through receiving genuine affirmation from oneself and others.

Before continuing, I offer some personal comments. Fifteen years ago, while helping to start the MA in Counseling Program at Franciscan University of Steubenville, I was introduced to three sources of wisdom and professional knowledge that influence my present thinking on the problem of pornography. These influences included not only the Thomistic-inspired psychology of Anna Terruwe and Conrad Baars; but also the Courage Apostolate, a support group for Catholics who experience homosexual attractions, yet who want to live chastely, and the work of mental health professionals who eventually formed NARTH: the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality. Along with my preexisting familiarity with the writing of John Paul II, these influences continue to direct my professional and academic work.

As a therapist, I spend a significant amount of time serving adults and young persons who experience unwanted homosexual attractions or behaviors, and/or their loved ones. I serve as the professional advisor and meeting facilitator for Courage in the Diocese of Fort Wayne- South Bend, Indiana. And as the supervising psychologist for a number of different therapists, I offer counsel on how to assist clients who are struggling with the causes and consequences of compulsive or addictive pornography use and masturbation, which commonly accompanies such use. These professional experiences form a practical background for what I have written.

## **I. “Affirmation” in the work of Anna Terruwe and Conrad Baars <sup>2</sup>**

The late Catholic psychiatrists Anna Terruwe and Conrad Baars developed an approach to the prevention and treatment of emotional disorders that was inspired by their study of the psychology of Thomas Aquinas. First Terruwe, and then Baars as her student, colleague and translator, studied, taught and used in therapy an applied Thomistic psychology. Much of their work focuses on the nature, maturation and- when disabled- healing and strengthening of the emotional life. The ecology of the emotions and the causes of and therapy for emotional repression are a major focus of their work, but time and space prevent a further discussion of

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<sup>2</sup> This and following sections summarize or include selected portions of an earlier paper by the author entitled: “Personalist Themes in the Applied Thomistic Psychology of Anna Terruwe and Conrad Baars,” in James DuBois (ed.), *The Nature and Tasks of a Personalist Psychology* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995), 113-139; which was an expanded version of “Personalist Themes in the Work of Conrad Baars and Anna Terruwe”, a paper presented at the Institute for Personalist Psychology (IPP) conference in October, 1994 at Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio, USA.

these topics.<sup>3</sup> Another significant focus of their work was affirmation, -or, as Conrad Baars tended to say in the last years of his life, “affirming living.”

Terruwe and Baars’s understanding of affirmation may be summarized as follows. To mature emotionally, each person must experience being affirmed. *Affirmation* is the universal, “fundamental human need”<sup>4</sup> to be strengthened (confirmed) emotionally, intellectually and morally. This occurs as one recognizes and “*feels*” his or her own goodness, worth, significance, value as a person, through the presence, appearance and actions of significant others, particularly our parents. *Being affirmed* involves persons’ experiencing that they are loved and lovable simply for *being*, for who they *are* -instead of for what they may do, achieve, produce or have. Although human beings never outgrow the need for affirmation, the experience of “being affirmed” occurs initially, and ideally, as parents and/or other significant persons are able to be present to their children “with the full attention of their whole being” and thereby are able to recognize and be moved with joy by their children’s goodness, truth and beauty and compassion when such are undeveloped or lacking.<sup>5</sup>

Terruwe and Baars consider affirmation so fundamental that they call being affirmed a human person’s “psychic” (meaning psychological) birth”. In *Psychic Wholeness and Healing*, they write:

To be and feel accepted and approved by others constitutes *man’s second birth, his psychic birth* Just as the human being is unable to give birth to himself, so he is not able to accept and love himself without the prior love of others. We receive our unique and specific full humanity from others. It is from this affirmation that we receive the strength *to be authentically human*, i.e., to give others in turn their unique and specific humanity (emphases in original).<sup>6</sup>

For the affirmer, *acting* affirming is secondary to *being* affirming. The process of (what Baars calls the “ABC’s”) of *affirming living* involves first the *attentive* presence and *awareness* of the affirmer, with and for the one to be affirmed. Such attentive awareness results in the affirmer’s *being* moved by, and genuinely feeling, the reality and goodness of the other. Such heartfelt empathy with and for the other leads to a *communion* between the affirmer and the other, as the former spontaneously reveals, nonverbally, a regard and care for the other. The other- as it were- “experiences his or her own truth, goodness, beauty, worth” and their potential for future flourishing, in and through the attentive presence of the affirmer.

As the needs of the other warrant, the affirmer may- or may not- say or *do* something with or for the other to express this caring explicitly. Intentional or habitual actions, gestures or words may- or may not- be

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<sup>3</sup> In addition to the paper by the author cited above, other sources of information about a Thomistic understanding of the emotions include: Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*, I-II, QQ, 22-48; Baars, Conrad W. *Feeling & Healing Your Emotions* (Revised edition.) Suzanne Baars and Bonnie Shayne (eds.). Gainesville, FL: Bridge-Logos, 2003; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Second Edition. Washington: United States Catholic Conference- *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, 1997; # 1762-1775; Groeschel, Fr. Benedict, CFR. *The Reform of Renewal* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990). Cf. Chapter Five: “The Conversion of the Emotions.”; Ripperger, Fr. Chad, FSSP. *Introduction to the Science of Mental Health: Philosophical Psychology* (Vol. 1), published by author; Terruwe, Anna & Baars, Conrad. *Psychic Wholeness and Healing*. New York: Alba House, 1981.; Vogt, Fr. Emmerich, O.P. *The Passions: A Guide for Understanding Your Feelings & Emotions*. Portland, OR: The 12-Step Review, # S-2, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Conrad Baars and Anna Terruwe, *Healing the Unaffirmed: Recognizing Deprivation Neurosis* (New York: Alba House, 1976), 204.

<sup>5</sup> Baars, *Feeling and Healing*, 153.

<sup>6</sup> Terruwe and Baars, *Psychic Wholeness*, 24.

necessary for another to be affirmed. Explicit communication or action need not (but may appropriately) follow the affirmer's being moved with love and compassion for the one affirmed to *feel* this emotional strengthening. Affirmation, or affirming living, is fundamentally a state of *being*, not doing, and implicit communion is necessary, and perhaps sufficient, for our psychological birth to occur.

## II. John Paul II as the "Pope of Affirmation"

"The truth that we owe to man is, first and foremost, a truth about man."<sup>7</sup> This quote comes from an address by Pope John Paul II at Puebla, Mexico to Latin American bishops and clergy during the first visit of his papacy to the Americas in January 1979. Baars uses this quote in the Postscript of his 1979 edition of *Feeling and Healing Your Emotions*, and Anna Terruwe and he use it in 1981 in the Preface and the first chapter of their final co-authored book, *Psychic Wholeness and Healing*.<sup>8</sup> Baars died in the Fall of 1981, having experienced only the first three years of John Paul II's pontificate. But, within the first year of his papacy, Baars already had declared John Paul II to be "an excellent example of what affirming living is all about."

Two months after John Paul II's visit to Mexico, he released his first Encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, which expresses the essence and heart of Terruwe and Baars thought. The following quote of John Paul II is a profound echo of what they mean by affirmation:

Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it. This, as has already been said, is why Christ the Redeemer 'fully reveals man to himself'. If we may use the expression, this is the human dimension of the mystery of the Redemption. In this dimension man finds again the greatness, dignity and value that belong to his humanity.<sup>9</sup>

Baars (with Terruwe) had met John Paul II before, in 1971 as Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, during a trip to the Vatican to discuss their Thomistic-inspired psychology. Baars recalled that at that meeting, he was impressed by the future Pope's intelligence, openness to asking questions and fostering discussion, and ability to make them feel at ease. During the first year of his pontificate, Baars noticed the genuinely affirming way that John Paul II "moves persons by his love, and by his courage to speak as he should speak, even in the presence of his enemies." In a videotaped workshop, Baars shows and describes a cartoon of John Paul II who has "a big smile and love on his face" for his flock while hitting a communist in the face with the shepherd's crook in his left hand. Baars asserts: "This is really the man we need for our time!"<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Feeling and Healing Your Emotions*, 283-284; *Psychic Wholeness and Healing*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> This was a revised edition of the first English translation of Terruwe's doctoral thesis: *The Neurosis in the Light of Rational Psychology* (1960.)

<sup>9</sup> *John Paul II* (March 1979), *Redemptor Hominis* (Boston: St. Paul Books & Media), n 10. This quoted section continues: "In the mystery of the Redemption man becomes newly 'expressed' and, in a way, is newly created. He is newly created! ... The man who wishes to understand himself thoroughly-and not just in accordance with immediate, partial, often superficial, and even illusory standards and measures of his being-he must with his unrest, uncertainty and even his weakness and sinfulness, with his life and death, draw near to Christ".

<sup>10</sup> Conrad Baars. *Affirming Living & Healing* (1979). Video (VHS) of Graduate Theology Workshop, Catholic Charismatic Bible Institute, St. Mary's University, San Antonio, Texas (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1992.)

In addition to being impressed by John Paul II's emotionally affirming person, presence and demeanor, as above quotation suggests, Baars and Terruwe admired his intellectual and moral affirmation as well. I believe that I understate when I say that the writings and talks of John Paul II are full of genuinely affirming intellectual and moral truths.

In keeping with the conference theme: "The International Year of the Family" and mindful of this being the tenth anniversary of the Holy Father's *Letter to Families*, I offer a few quotes from the *Letter* as examples. In Chapter 15, which is entitled: "The Fourth Commandment: 'Honor your father and your mother'", John Paul II expresses well the essence of what Terruwe and Baars mean by affirmation. The Holy Father writes that this commandment is a profound call to "mutual honor": for parents to honor their children and each other, as well as, more literally, for children to honor their parents. He explains: " 'To honor' means to acknowledge! We could put it this way: 'let yourself be guided by the firm acknowledgment of the person' ..., an acknowledgment of the individual simply because he is an individual, 'this' individual life." Honoring another, then "is essentially an attitude of unselfishness. It could be said that it is "a sincere gift of person to person", and in that sense honor converges with love."<sup>11</sup>

Prior to this, in Chapters 11 (*The sincere gift of self*) and 12 (*Responsible fatherhood and motherhood*), John Paul II restates and explains the teaching of the Second Vatican Council that man "cannot 'fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self'." This apparent contradiction "is the magnificent paradox of human existence: an existence called to serve the truth in love. Love causes man to find fulfillment through the sincere gift of self. To love means to give and to receive something which can be neither bought nor sold, but only given freely and mutually."<sup>12</sup> Sincere self-donation is the necessary path to human fulfillment "because (man) has been created in the image and likeness of god and redeemed by the only-begotten Son of the Father, who became man for us and for our salvation".<sup>13</sup>

### III. Pornography as the *Pseudo-Self-Affirming Denial of the Person*

In this section, I respond more directly to the topic of Mr. Jacobs' paper. I discuss how participation in pornography may be considered an example of "pseudo-self-affirmation" as understood in the work of Terruwe and Baars, and related thoughts in the writings of John Paul II. Truthfully, most of what I've written applies as well to other forms of unchaste- as well as nonsexual, compulsive or addictive- behaviors besides pornography or masturbation, its frequent attendant.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Pope John Paul II (1994), *Letter to Families* (Boston, MA: Pauline Books and Media), # 15.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, # 11.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, #12. I think that an unfortunate, contemporary meaning of the word "sincere" may prevent an accurate understanding. The truth that self-fulfillment comes through sincere- and ideally mutual- self-giving means more than doing so with "good intentions" or in "good faith." The truth of this statement by the Council and its reassertion by John Paul II's hinges on the meaning of sincere as not just a quality of intention or of process, but of reality. A "sincere" gift in the full sense means one that is "genuine", "real" or "valid", one that is free of "hypocrisy, deceit or simulation" (*Funk & Wagnalls Standard Desk Dictionary, NY: Harper & Ro, 1984*). I often have wondered if the assertion that man does not 'fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self' might be rendered better: "except through a sincere and wise gift of self."

<sup>14</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1997, Second Edition; Washington: United States Catholic Conference- Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997) describes "pornography" as a behavior which: "consists in removing real or simulated sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners, in order to display them deliberately to third parties. It offends against chastity because it perverts the conjugal act, the intimate giving of spouses to each other. It does grave injury to the dignity of its participants (actors, vendors, the public), since each one becomes an object of base pleasure and illicit profit for others. It immerses all who are involved in the illusion of a fantasy world. It is a grave offense" (# 2354). Jacobs cites the *Catechism* description of

Mr. Jacobs discusses the negative *consequences* of pornography on the personhood of -and the “communion of persons” between and among- those who participate in its production, distribution or consumption. Participation in pornography is justifiably characterized as an objectification, denial or depersonalization of those who participate in it. My contribution to his discussion is to consider the *motivation* for such participation, especially by compulsive or addicted consumers. Using the ideas of Baars, Terruwe and John Paul II, I next explain the concept of *pseudo*-self-affirmation and how compensating for a significant lack of affirmation may be a strong motivation for participation in pornography.

In brief, a person may engage in the habitual use of pornography as a self-defeating attempt to compensate for having been poorly affirmed or even disaffirmed- denied- as a person of worth and dignity. Terruwe and Baars explain that the human need for affirmation is so fundamental that persons who are significantly unaffirmed or inadequately affirmed are likely to be emotionally underdeveloped and driven to seek the *experience* of being loved and loveable- and/or escape the experience of feeling unloved or unlovable- in a variety of self-defeating ways. <sup>15</sup> Terruwe and Baars call the self-defeating action, habit or lifestyle of trying to make oneself feel affirmed is called “*self-affirmation*.”<sup>16</sup> Although wholesome self-affirmation is possible for persons who have been affirmed and are emotionally mature and may be learned and practiced by those who have not, Terruwe and Baars use the term “self-affirmation” almost exclusively to mean “*pseudo*-self-affirmation”. I use this latter term to avoid confusion.

Pseudo-self-affirmation means “looking for love in all the wrong places.” Pseudo-self-affirmers may seek the experience of being affirmed- and/or avoid the feelings of being unaffirmed or disaffirmed in many ways: amassing financial wealth or material possessions, acquiring status symbols such as professional degrees or credentials, excessive striving to achieve occupational success or community involvement, seeking political power, becoming famous or associating with others who are famous, engaging in sexual promiscuity, or abusing mind-altering drugs or other substances. Under-affirmed persons who are very talented, attractive or assertive may be particularly prone to pseudo-self-affirming lifestyles centered on seeking wealth, fame, power or pleasure.<sup>17</sup>

The lifestyles of pseudo-self-affirmers may be truly self-defeating “vicious circles”. For, such attempts to create the experience of being loved or worthwhile only leave deeper feelings of being unloved or worthless, which may lead to additional and more intense self-defeating efforts.<sup>18</sup> Some pseudo-self-affirming habits may be accurately classified as “secondary or psychological addictions.” In such cases, the unmet need for affirmation is the motivating force behind a person's inability to limit or stop the “addictive” behavior. Of course, with a drug or other substance addiction, a “primary” addiction may also exist. Sexual compulsions may be a secondary effect of a lack of affirmation, as well as a primary effect of emotional repression.

One characteristic of compulsive sexual behaviors is a selfish preoccupation which prevents the “sincere self-giving” which John Paul II -and Vatican Council II- describe as essential for human fulfillment. Sexual compulsions- and addictions- involve a degree of psychological “bondage” or slavery. People who act in a psychologically compulsive or addictive manner have lost a significant degree of freedom to choose otherwise. In the 14<sup>th</sup> Chapter (*Love is demanding*) of *Letter to Families*, John Paul II emphasizes that making

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“*masturbation*”.

<sup>15</sup> Terruwe and Baars, *Healing the Unaffirmed*, chapters 1-2.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*; Terruwe and Baars, *Psychic Wholeness*, 25; Baars, *Born Only Once*, 73-80.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Baars, *Born Only Once*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

oneself a sincere gift “for others” is at “the very heart of the Gospel truth about *freedom*. The person realizes himself by the exercise of freedom in truth. Freedom cannot be understood as a license to do *absolutely anything*: it means a *gift of self*. Even more: it means an *interior discipline of the gift*.”

In this context, the Holy Father contrasts genuine *personalism* with *individualism* which is antithetical to a sincere gift of self. He explains that in contrast to a person making a free and “sincere gift” of him or her self:

Individualism presupposes a use of freedom in which the subject does what he wants, in which he himself is the one to "establish the truth" of whatever he finds pleasing or useful. He does not tolerate the fact that someone else "wants" or demands something from him in the name of an objective truth. He does not want to "give" to another on the basis of truth; he does not want to become a "sincere gift". Individualism thus remains egocentric and selfish. The real antithesis between individualism and personalism emerges not only on the level of theory, but even more *on that of "ethos"*. The "ethos" of personalism is altruistic: it moves the person to become a gift for others and to discover joy in giving himself. This is the joy about which Christ speaks (cf. *Jn* 15:11; 16:20-22).<sup>19</sup>

In contrast to the ethos of personalism, the cultural ethos of individualism ultimately frustrates the human quest for joyful, self-fulfilling, self-giving. For individualism is rooted in “ethical utilitarianism” which is itself founded on “the continual quest for ‘maximum’ happiness. But this is a ‘*utilitarian happiness*’, seen only as pleasure, as immediate gratification for the exclusive benefit of the individual, apart from or opposed to the objective demands of the true good.”<sup>20</sup> As such, the ethos of individualism provides significant individual and cultural support for unchaste behavior, including participation in pornography and the all too common attending practice of masturbation. These and all compulsions to unchaste behavior are caused by, and invariably cause to worsen, the persisting human tendency toward egocentrism and selfishness.<sup>21</sup>

John Paul II’s further discussion of unchaste “free love” also has particular relevance to pornography and its attending behaviors. He writes that:

the phenomenon of so-called “*free love*”; this is particularly dangerous because it is usually suggested as a way of following one’s “real” feelings, but it is in fact destructive of love. How many families have been ruined because of “free love”! To follow in every instance a “real” emotional impulse by invoking a love “liberated” from all conditionings, means nothing more than to make the individual a slave to those human instincts which Saint Thomas calls “passions of the soul”. “Free love” exploits human weaknesses; it gives them a certain “veneer” of respectability with the help of seduction and the blessing of public opinion. In this way there is an attempt to “soothe” consciences by creating a “moral alibi”. But not all of the consequences are taken into consideration, especially when the ones who end up paying are, apart from the other spouse, the children, deprived of a father

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<sup>19</sup> John Paul II, *Letter to Families*, # 14.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality: Guidelines for Education within the Family* (Pontifical Council for the Family. Boston, MA: Pauline Books and Media, 1996) talks about the need to always to bear in mind that human sexuality is affected by original sin. Specifically, “when teaching Catholic doctrine and morality about sexuality, *the lasting effects of original sin* must be taken into account, that is to say, human weakness and the need for the grace of God to overcome temptations and avoid sin” (# 122-123).

or mother and condemned to be in fact *orphans of living parents*.<sup>22</sup>

Many children-and adults- were affirmed only partially or not at all- because their parents or other significant adults were physically absent too often or at important times and/or were emotionally unavailable when physically present. As John Paul II writes above, such unaffirmed or disaffirmed children rightfully may be called “orphans of living parents”. Analogously, their physically or psychologically abandoned partners deservedly may be called “widows- or widowers- of living spouses.”

Children who are deprived of a mother or father’s love may experience “many dire consequences.” Emotionally, physically or even sexually neglected or abused children- and adults- commonly experience “painful, fresh wounds...hidden” in their hearts.<sup>23</sup> Such wounds and bad examples, if not forgiven, healed or otherwise resolved, are likely to repeat themselves in multiple generations of poorly loved- and poorly loving- men, women and children. The emotional pain and sadness caused by such wounds often drives young persons to experiment with and then persist in self-comforting, self- soothing, emotional pain-anesthetizing unchaste behaviors. Persistent practice leads to habits carried into adulthood. Such pseudo-self-affirming habits not uncommonly develop into true compulsions and addictions, which involve a denial of the truth about oneself and others, and the diminished freedom and capacity for “sincere love.”

Habitual or compulsive participation in pornography (and masturbation) often is motivated by an underlying psychological need for genuine affirmation that was lacking during a person’s infancy or youth. When persons attempt to compensate for their unmet needs for authentic love through sexual vice, they commonly find that the unmet needs grow more intense. Just as a person who habitually assuages the legitimate hunger for nutrition with tasty but non-nutritious “junk food” winds up physically malnourished, so does the participant in pornography wind up emotionally and spiritually malnourished.

All pseudo-self-affirming behaviors, including those which gratify “lust” (i.e., the “disordered desire for or inordinate enjoyment of sexual pleasure (which) is morally disordered when sought for itself, isolated from its procreative and unitive purposes”) <sup>24</sup> ultimately leave a person frustrated and unfulfilled. Pseudo-self-affirmation renders a person less able to receive or give love, sexually or otherwise. It also frustrates the genuine “communion of persons” which they intrinsically, if not consciously, need. As in attempting to meet legitimate needs for affirmation, the “vicious cycle” of pornography use, etc., perpetuates itself unless the person is able to learn how to love him or herself- and to be loved by others- in genuinely affirming ways.

#### **IV. Chastity: the Fruit of Genuine Affirmation**

Genuine affirmation and growth in chastity are the means of preventing and remediating pseudo-self-affirming participation in pornography. Being taught and learning to become chaste in one’s youth enables one to avoid becoming trapped in the habitual practice of pornography and other unchaste behaviors. Beginning to learn, or relearning chastity after one has developed an unchaste habit is the simple, but not easy, path by which someone entrapped by unchastity may become free(r) to love him- or her-self and others. Whether as education, prevention or remediation, genuine affirmation of oneself by others and oneself is a necessary condition for growth in chastity.

As the *Catechism* reminds us: “Chastity means the successful integration of sexuality within the

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<sup>22</sup> John Paul II, *Letter to Families*, # 14.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Catechism* # 2351.

person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being. Sexuality...becomes personal and truly human when it is integrated into the relationship of one person to another, in the complete and lifelong mutual gift of a man and a woman" (# 2337). Chastity involves a growth "in self-mastery which is a training in human freedom. The alternative is clear: either man governs his passions and finds peace, or he lets himself be dominated by them and becomes unhappy" (# 2339). This self-mastery is a life- "long and exacting work" (#2342) which requires "self-knowledge, practice of an asceticism adapted to the situations that confront him, obedience to God's commandments, exercise of the moral virtues, and fidelity to prayer" (# 2337). "The virtue of chastity blossoms" and "is expressed notably in friendship with one's neighbor" whether "between persons of the same or opposite sex" (# 2347).

### ***Prevention through Education and Formation in Chastity***

From the perspective of Baars and Terruwe, the education (formation) of children in chastity invariably occurs, both implicitly and explicitly, if and as one is being genuinely affirmed. As stated above in Part I, being *affirmed* involves our being *confirmed* or strengthened, intellectually and morally, as well as emotionally. Emotional strengthening occurs as we experience (i.e., notice and are moved ourselves by) the visible, sensible, physical changes in the affirmer's face, posture and voice. Genuine intellectual and moral strengthening requires that a person be given and receive accurate intellectual, moral and spiritual truth. One's intuitive mind (*intellectus*) as well as one's thinking or logical mind (*ratio*), and one's will, require a balanced diet of timely truths. Baars writes of the need for:

balance between emotional and intellectual affirmation, between the giving of emotional health food and intellectual truths. ...If one gives the emotional health food together with insufficient intellectual and spiritual food, the emotions are denied the necessary guidance and tempering. If, on the other hand, one gives an abundance of intellectual and spiritual truths together with emotional junk food, one offers only half-truths. 25

In order for intellectual affirmation to occur, it is necessary for parents and other familial and social "educators" to teach rational, moral and spiritual truth in the right time and the right way. Children need to be taught according to their maturity and ability to understand, and challenged to know, be and do all that of which they are capable. Children also need their parents (and other educators) not to give what the children are not ready to accept and not to demand or expect from their children what the latter are not ready or able to do or give. In addition, children need their educators to teach by their example as well as their words, to live the intellectual and moral truths that they teach. Genuinely affirming parents, their surrogates and all caretakers of the young need especially to refrain from any immoral behavior, whether toward children or in their presence. This requires "self-restraining love" from the parents. 26

It is worth citing here a passage from the Pontifical Council for the Family's document: *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*. While the document offers wisdom for educating (teaching or forming) children of all ages in chastity, guidance on forming teenagers is particularly noteworthy. In this document,

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25 Baars, *Feeling and Healing*, 234.

26 Baars and Terruwe, *Healing the Unaffirmed*, 185-189.

the Pontifical Council asserts that “during the stages of adolescent growth, sexuality has a “positive significance” for the “personal harmony and development” of persons, especially during adolescence. Therefore, adolescents in particular must be lovingly persuaded “that the disordered use of sex tends progressively to destroy the person's capacity to love by making pleasure, instead of sincere self-giving, the end of sexuality and by reducing other persons to objects of one's own gratification. In this way the meaning of true love between a man and a woman (love always open to life) is weakened as well as the family itself”.<sup>27</sup>

In line with Terruwe and Baar’s understanding of “self-restraining”, affirming parental love, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality* recognizes the importance of “friendships” during adolescence and that “adolescence is a time when young people enjoy more autonomy in their relations with others and in the hours they keep in family life.” But this document also advises that “without taking away” the adolescent’s “rightful autonomy, when necessary, parents should know how to say ‘no’ to their children and, at the same time, they should know how to cultivate a taste in their children for what is beautiful, noble and true. Parents should also be sensitive to adolescents' self-esteem, which may pass through a confused phase when they are not clear about what personal dignity means and requires”.<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality* also reminds parents that through their “loving and patient advice” they will be able to “help young people to avoid an excessive closing in on themselves. When necessary, they will also teach them to go against social trends that tend to stifle true love and an appreciation for spiritual realities”, especially looking to Christ to “restore, establish, and strengthen” them in their efforts (1 Peter 5:8-10).<sup>29</sup>

The clinical wisdom of Terruwe and Baars also deserves to be heard and heeded. On the one hand, giving accurate information about the moral law to children before they are mature enough to understand it and giving inaccurate information have both led to emotional repression. For example, emphasizing moral behavior to younger children in a manner which suggests that "sinful behavior is always a sin" may result in children developing much irrational fear or restless striving about the moral law. Some sincere, sensitive and intelligent persons may develop emotional difficulties as a result of being taught moral truths prematurely, inaccurately or in an overly fearful manner. Scrupulosity or difficulties with obsessive-compulsive behaviors may result if young persons come to believe mistakenly that it was wrong- even sinful- for them to feel certain emotions and bodily feelings and thereby habitually push such feelings out of conscious awareness.<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand, a form of pseudo-affirmation or denial of the personhood of children and adults may occur when psychological and spiritual educators, including parents, lower moral standards by giving the message that a given "sin is not a sin."<sup>31</sup> This may be communicated directly, in words or writings, or indirectly, through indifference, too permissive or absent guidance, and bad example. Such "open-minded" neglect leads minor (and adult) children to believe that they are "too weak" to live the moral life, that the moral life is too difficult or that the joy of the moral life is not worth the effort that may be required. Such intellectual and moral denial also leaves children- and adults- at great risk of suffering psychological and spiritual harm as a consequence of immoral actions and lifestyles, such as participation on pornography.

I do not want to minimize the difficulty which parents and other “parental educators” have in

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<sup>27</sup> *Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality* # 105.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid # 107.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid # 108.

<sup>30</sup> Baars, *Feeling and Healing*, 120.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid 41-42.

teaching young persons the virtuous life. And I do not want to overlook the need that those who “educate” the young in virtue have to seek the same divine assistance for teaching that their young persons need for living chastity and all of the virtues. Thank God that in Him, all things are possible!

### ***Remediation of “Interior Chastity” through Genuine (Self-)Affirmation***

Someone who is caught in the habitual, compulsive or even addictive use of pornography or other unchaste behaviors may find freedom through growth in chastity. Courage founder, Fr. John Harvey, OSFS, exhorts Courage members, and indeed all who struggle with living chastely, to pursue “interior chastity” according to the “Twelve Step” model. Unlike “white-knuckled” chastity<sup>32</sup> - what Twelve Step groups like Alcoholics Anonymous or Sexaholics Anonymous call sobriety or abstinence- interior chastity is peace of mind and joy of heart as well as the self-discipline of sexual behavior (continence). Twelve Step language calls this “serenity”. Achieving serenity requires such spiritual disciplines as submission and conversion to God’s will, repentance and confession of wrongdoing, giving and receiving forgiveness and making amends for one’s actions, peer accountability, prayer and service.<sup>33</sup> Such steps are implicitly and genuinely self-affirming.

#### *Genuine Affirmation*

Unaffirmed or disaffirmed persons may help themselves break a self-defeating cycle like the compulsive use of pornography by seeking the presence of mature, emotionally, morally and intellectually affirming adults. Those who are authentically living the affirming life are able to recognize and be moved with compassion by the goodness and suffering of those who have not been affirmed. Hopefully, any therapists, counselors, pastoral caregivers or even wise friends who are sought for help are authentically affirming persons capable of self-restraining love. This means, in the words of Adrian van Kaam, that the caregivers are able to answer the sufferer’s fundamental need and appeal: “Please be **with** me and **for** me” (emphasis added).<sup>34</sup> A genuine affirmer is one who can be fully present to the sufferer and love him or her unconditionally. An affirmer is a person in whom “kindness (or mercy or love) and truth meet” and “justice and peace embrace” (cf. Psalm 85: 11). The unaffirmed who are trapped in sexual compulsion need the loving presence of someone who neither condones unchastity nor condemns someone for being unchaste.

#### *Genuine Self-Affirmation*

According to Baars and Terruwe, the first step which unaffirmed persons may need to take to ready themselves for the authentic affirming presence of others is to stop or avoid any pseudo-self-affirming behaviors (such as the chronic use of pornography). This is easier to do if they already have begun to experience an emotionally affirming person who truly cares for them with self-restraining love. Another step is learning to lead a calmer, less hurried, more patient and lifestyle so that they may become more present to others and recognize better the goodness in others and themselves. A third step typically involves becoming

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<sup>32</sup> I have heard Fr. Harvey speak about “interior” vs. “white-knuckled” chastity on numerous occasions.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *The Twelve Steps: A Spiritual Journey* (Curtis, WA: RPI Publishing, 1994), xii-xiii.

<sup>34</sup> Adrian van Kaam, *The Art of Existential Counseling* (Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, 1966), 33.

more assertive. This includes their stopping trying to please everyone and risking "hurting other's feelings" while doing what seems right. Other steps include practicing "positive imagination" and self-restraining love. Baars encourages the unaffirmed- and also those who are learning to feel emotions previously were repressed- to be gentle with themselves and their feelings that seem so "child-like". Patience is necessary to allow previously undeveloped or repressed emotions to "grow up" in their own way and at their own pace, according to the "law of gradualness." Emotional maturity also involves a season of "trial and error", as well as success, in learning whether, when and how to express or choose to act under the influence of awakening emotions.<sup>35</sup>

Along with the wisdom of 12 Step Groups, the experience of modern fatherhood movements such as *St. Joseph Covenant Keepers* and *Promise Keepers* offer men who struggle to be chaste and who were poorly affirmed growing up a healthy measure of challenging support. Men who grew up without experiencing genuine affirmation from their fathers tend to have trouble with knowing what it meant to be "a man", with commitment in relationships, and with chastity (self-disciplined sexual behavior).

Overcoming the effects of physical or emotional paternal absence- and perhaps corresponding maternal over-involvement- typically involves helping men: to make peace- through grieving and perhaps psychotherapy- with the memories, leftover emotions and ongoing relationships with their fathers, and sometimes their mothers; to seek the support of and to share mutual accountability with men who share their goal; to experience some form of surrogate fathering or mentoring (pastoral, therapeutic, etc.); to work toward sexual self-discipline aimed at serenity (peace of mind and joy of heart) and, if married, fidelity to their spouses and appropriate involvement with their children; and to use appropriate spiritual and religious activities as resources for change and growth.<sup>36</sup>

### *Humility*

I recall that when asked what were the three most important virtues for living a holy life, St. Bernard answered: "Humility, humility, humility!" Fundamentally, receiving or giving genuine affirmation and growing in chastity requires humility, which is the fruit of a prayerful

and charitable life. Realistic self-understanding and self-acceptance that are the heart of humility are the basis for genuine affirmation of self and others.

Two traps often faced by those who are unaffirmed and who struggle with sexual compulsion are the extremes of pride, despair and presumption. The unaffirmed may be stuck on, or vacillate between, believing or living as if they *won't* or *can't* be loved (as if they are undeserving or unlovable) and as if they *don't need* to be loved. Those "imprisoned" by sexual compulsion often are stuck between condemning themselves as unforgivable or worthless and condoning their behaviors as "not (too) bad" after all. With humility, it is possible to realize and accept the possibility, as well as the difficulty, of being loved and loving authentically. This includes embracing both the challenges and hopes for living a serenely chaste life, free of compulsions like pornography.

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<sup>35</sup> Baars, *Born Only Once*, 81-99.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Philip Sutton. *Fathers Become Who You Are!: Social Science and magisterial Teaching on What Causes Fatherlessness and How to Strengthen the Fatherhood of All Men*. Privately printed, 1999.

Humble self-affirmation by those who have significant difficulties being chaste requires that they discern: “Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, and if there is anything worthy of praise” (Phil 4: 8) about their compulsions and behaviors. Such compulsions often are triggered by unmet, genuine needs that are disguised or felt as “sexual”. Some needs are relational, such as seeking to be affirmed in the present and/or compensate for not having been affirmed in the past. Others are more psychological, coping with unpleasant emotions or feelings or biological needs.<sup>37</sup>

My experiences within the Courage ministry and providing therapy to persons with unwanted homosexual (same sex) attractions or behaviors (SSA) offer an example. SSA are understood as ways of seeking the “3 A’s: attention, affection and affirmation” from significant, same gender persons. Commonly, SSA are rooted in healthy needs for attention, affection and affirmation that were met poorly in parental and peer relationships while growing up. Such legitimate needs also typically coexist with unresolved, and often repressed, sadness, anger and emotional pain leftover from neglectful, abusive and/or otherwise emotionally traumatic (i.e., un- or dis-affirming) parental and peer relationships. Humble, self-affirmation involves recognizing and taking steps both to satisfy healthy same gender needs and to forgive, otherwise resolve and heal the offenses and wounds from the past that remain so powerfully influential in the present.

### *Genuine Forgiveness*

On the one hand, the forgiveness process properly *understood* and *practiced* enables one who has been offended to set him or herself free of the offense and the offender, even while continuing to cope with unchangeable difficulties resulting from the offense. <sup>38</sup> On the other hand, genuine forgiveness includes facing and feeling one’s unresolved anger- and underlying

pain, the personal and relational consequences of one’s anger, and one’s possible co-responsibility for one’s present life difficulties.

For example, men with SSA commonly have “experienced” same gender emotional deprivation or even traumatic dis-affirmation. This experience may be need not be *objectively* “neglectful or abusive”. Children who are more temperamentally sensitive, intelligent and imaginative than average may find outwardly “unremarkable” treatment from fathers, siblings or peers so *subjectively* distressing that they react as if the (mis-)treatment was severe. If the treatment is objectively un- or dis-affirming, such children will “feel” it to have been more distressing than average. Protecting oneself from further distress is at the origin of SSA. <sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Common 12 Step wisdom advises a person not to become “too tired, hungry, angry or lonely” to avoid triggering an attraction to the addictive behavior one is trying to overcome. A more complete description of emotions or feelings states to be managed in order too avoid behavioral relapse is, to avoid becoming ASPHALTED: too Anxious, Sad, Pained, Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired, Elated, or Discouraged. I have in mind Uncle Remus’ B’rer Rabbit, who had a self-defeating (asphalting) encounter with the Tar Baby when the latter would not behave as Rabbit wished.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Enright, *Forgiveness is a Choice* (Washington: APA, 2001); Robert Enright & Richard Fitzgibbons, *Helping Clients Forgive* (Washington: APA, 2000); cf. International Forgiveness Institute, web-site: [www.forgiveness-institute.org](http://www.forgiveness-institute.org).

<sup>39</sup> In an audiotaped talk (Boston, MA: Pauline Books and Media) at the 1994 Courage Conference entitled: *Shattered Hearts-Whole Spirits*, psychiatrist Jeffrey Satinover explains the concept of the “childhood vow”. In response to emotional distress which a child perceives as “intolerable”, the child “vows” not to allow him/herself to be distressed again. Such a “decision”, often a product of inexperience and immature judgment and made subconsciously, is one explanation for what other therapists

Such men grew up “defensively detaching” from their fathers or other significant males. This means that they self-protectively withdrew from and habitually came to avoid future intimate encounters with the salient males in their lives, including peers, as a way of preventing further perceived rejection or abandonment. In overcoming the compulsive sexual behaviors which are rooted in such self-protective repression, the men must realize that “the true damage was done not by the father (or peers, etc.), *but by his own defensive detachment from him* (or them).” Overcoming the simultaneous need and aversion for male contact may be possible only if the man works to understand and ultimately accept (i.e., forgive) his “father for who he is, with his limitations, including his (past and perhaps present) limited ability to demonstrate love, affection, and acceptance”.<sup>40</sup> Understanding and accepting sibling or peer disaffirmers may also be necessary if one is to overcome unchaste habits which are motivated by such unresolved hurts and resentments. Finally, forgiving others may require recognizing the need for, and learning to forgive, oneself for having been co-responsible for or a co-participant in one’s avoidance of potentially affirming contacts with others.

### *Prayer*

Prayer is an excellent means of genuine self-affirmation. Prayer also is fundamental way for those who seek to overcome the difficulties of both sexual compulsion and emotional deprivation (having been poorly, un- or dis-affirmed). Whether one follows the wisdom of the 12 Steps, the Christian Men’s Movements, or Baars and Terruwe, daily meditation helps us to “be still and know who is God” (cf. Ps 46:11). Those who “are still before the Lord” and who “find their delight in Him” find that the Lord reveals and ultimately satisfies the genuine “desires of their hearts” (cf. Ps 37: 4, 6).

As Fr. Harvey often reminds those attending Courage conferences, “prayer of the heart leads to chastity of the heart.” Meditative or contemplative prayer opens a person up to the Truth and His genuinely affirming- and loving- moral truths and to the grace to follow them- and Him. Psychiatrist Richard Fitzgibbons has written about the use of Catholic spirituality for overcoming SSA and healing the hurts which cause and result from SSA behaviors.<sup>41</sup> Fitzgibbons readily refers his audiences to Harvard psychiatrist Herbert Benson’s empirical study on the use of relaxing meditation for the resolution of a number of psychological problems, including compulsive behaviors.<sup>42</sup>

Throughout their writings and talks, Baars and Terruwe consistently advise their clients about both the spiritual and psychological benefits of regular religious practice. They encourage the practice of contemplative, as well as meditative, prayer and scripture reading in order to come to know God better so that we can love Him more with our “heart,” our humane emotions and intuition, as well as with our rational mind and will.<sup>43</sup> They regard contemplative prayer as a way to develop and nurture our ability to love our

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who treat SSA call “defensive detachment”.

<sup>40</sup> Joseph Nicolosi, *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality: A New Clinical Approach* (Northvale, NJ: Aronson, 1997), 161.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Fitzgibbons, “The Origins and Healing of Homosexual Attractions and Behaviors”. In John F. Harvey, O.S.F.S. *The Truth About Homosexuality* (Ignatius Press, 1996), 307-343. Cf. *Homosexuality & Hope: Statement of the Catholic Medical Association* (2000, website: [www.cathmed.org](http://www.cathmed.org)); and *Homosexuality & Hope* (Question and Answer Pamphlet- 2003; website: [www.cmalansing.org](http://www.cmalansing.org)) of which Fitzgibbons is primary author.

<sup>42</sup> E.G., Herbert Benson, M.D. *Beyond the Relaxation Response: How to Harness the Healing Power of Your Personal Beliefs* (NY: Berkley, 1984).

<sup>43</sup> Baars, *Feeling and Healing*, 243-244.

neighbors and ourselves in more affirming ways. Also Baars composed meditation tapes based on scripture to aid in learning both self-relaxation and contemplative prayer.<sup>44</sup> Baars and Terruwe likewise encouraged their clients to practice “natural” contemplation through the experience of both divinely created and humanly engendered beauty.

The contemplation of religious art, especially icons and statues, may be particularly helpful to those who struggle with pornography. Total abstinence from future pornography does not erase from visual or auditory memory, pictures, films or other media already experienced. Persons trying to resist remembered pornography can find that intentionally experiencing religious or natural beauty at moments of temptation to remember or fantasize about past pornography may help them overcome such temptations.

Meditation on authentic beauty- whether natural or religious- gives an alternative focus for one’s attention imagination. It also affords, with time and practice, an awareness of and detachment from any emotions or feelings that are seeking indirect satisfaction or expression through the use of pornography. One who struggles with sexual compulsions may, with realistic hope, seek increasing freedom from such compulsions and a measure of peace and joy (serenity) through the contemplation of truth and beauty in genuine literary and musical art, as well.

### Concluding Thoughts

I began Part II of the section on “John Paul II as the ‘Pope of Affirmation’” with the following quote by John Paul II: “*The truth that we owe to man is, first and foremost, a truth about man.*” The quote continues:

*Perhaps one of the most obvious weaknesses of present-day civilization lies in an inadequate view of man. Without doubt, our age is the one in which man has been most written and spoken of, the age of the foremost of humanism and the age of anthropocentrism. Nevertheless it is paradoxically also the age of man’s deepest anxiety about his identity and his destiny, the age of man’s abasement to previously unsuspected levels, the age of human values trampled on as never before. How is this paradox explained? We can say that it is in the inexorable paradox of atheistic humanism it is the drama of man being deprived of an essential dimension of his being, namely his search for the infinite, and thus faced with having his being reduced in the worst way. Thanks to the Gospel...the truth about man...is found in an anthropology...whose primordial affirmation is that man is God’s image.”*

In commenting on the entire quote, Baars states that the Holy Father’s: “words underscore the meaning and spirit of what I consider my task and that of every Christian psychiatrist” - and indeed, every scholar, researcher and practitioner in the psychological arts and sciences- “to assist the Church and all Christians in knowing more about man as the image of God, to lessen his abasement, and to bring order and strength to his psychic life for optimal receptivity to God’s healing grace.”<sup>45</sup>

John Paul II’s use of the word “affirmation” expresses an important dimension of affirming living. Human beings are made “in love, for love and to love.” Experiencing the fullness of life, peace, joy and

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<sup>44</sup> Conrad Baars. Audiotapes: Fear is Useless--What is Needed is Trust; Don't Look at the Waves--Look at Jesus; Speak Lord--An Aid to Meditation; and Be Still--An Aid to Contemplation. (Cf. [www.conradbaars.com](http://www.conradbaars.com)).

<sup>45</sup> Conrad W. Baars, *Feeling & Healing Your Emotions* (Revised edition.) Suzanne Baars and Bonnie Shayne (eds.) (Gainesville, FL: Bridge-Logos, 2003, 283-284.)

freedom of the Truth, and from His “truth about man”, is the created and recreated “birth right” of every human person. For Baars and Terruwe, genuine affirmation includes *speaking* and *living* the truth in love (cf. Eph 4: 15, 25). Authentic self-affirmation likewise requires *hearing* and living the truth in love, which includes hearing and living the love in the truth about the moral law.

Growth in the virtue of chastity- which may involve the struggle of stopping or avoiding pornography, masturbation and other unchaste behaviors- is essential to embracing and fulfilling our human destiny. To flourish as persons, the human race- as individuals and as pluralities- must hear and heed the love of those who speak the truth to us, whether expressed in actions, words or gestures. This is the essence of giving and receiving affirmation and the means by which the genuine emotional, intellectual, moral and spiritual strengthening, growth and fulfillment of every person may occur.

It is good to realize that embracing the call- or calling another- to conversion and to growth in chastity really is “good news.” As John Paul II explains in *Reconciliation and Penance*: “Conversion and contrition ... for the purpose of bringing about a radical change of life... are (not just unpleasant self-denial but) even more a *drawing near to the holiness of God* (which means becoming more able to know the truth and to love and be loved) a *rediscovery of one’s true identity*, which has been upset and disturbed by sin, a *liberation in the very depth of self* and thus a *regaining of lost joy*, the joy of being saved (cf. Ps 51:12), which the majority of people in our time are no longer capable of experiencing (emphasis added).”<sup>46</sup>

Teaching or learning chastity- and preventing or escaping unchastity- is a daunting task. I am comforted by the reality that growth in virtue and genuine affirmation is divinely willed, directed and empowered for all. Sharing a few quotes from the last section of *Letter to Families* (entitled: “Strengthened in the inner man”) seems a fitting way to end this paper. In closing his *Letter*, John Paul II writes:

I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every fatherhood and motherhood is named, “that he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man” (Eph 3:16). The family is the first human setting in which is formed that “inner man” of which the Apostle speaks. The growth of the inner man in strength and vigor is a gift of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. 47

Genuine affirmation of one human person by another, and properly done, *of oneself by oneself*, is the ordinary means by which the Lord enables the “inner man”- the unique personhood- of every human being to grow “in strength and vigor”. Such growth in “virtue” is both prevention and remedy for pseudo-self-affirming behaviors like pornography. No matter how gratifying unchaste behaviors may “seem” short-term- they always and ultimately disaffirm, deny and “weaken” the personhood- and family life- of those who practice them.

John Paul II reminds us implicitly of the Christian truth about affirming living within the family and its

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46 John Paul II, *Reconciliation and Penance* (, 1984), n. 29. In *Veritatis Splendor* (Boston, MA: Pauline Books and Media, 1993), John Paul II likewise reminds us that: “It is the Gospel which reveals the full truth about man and his moral journey, and thus enlightens and admonishes sinners; it proclaims to them God’s mercy, which is constantly at work to preserve them both from despair at their inability fully to know and keep God’s law and from the presumption that they can be saved without merit. God also reminds sinners of the *joy of forgiveness*, which alone grants the strength to see in the moral law a *liberating truth, a grace-filled source of hope, a path of life* (n. 112).”

47 *Letter to Families*, # 23.

relation to growth in chastity, when he writes about the need for family members to be “witnesses” of holiness. 48

I speak with the power of his truth to all people of our day, so that they will come to appreciate the grandeur of the goods of marriage, family and life; so that they will come to appreciate the great danger which follows when these realities are not respected, or when the supreme values which lie at the foundation of the family and of human dignity are disregarded. May the Lord Jesus repeat these truths to us *with the power and the wisdom of the Cross*, so that humanity will not yield to the temptation of the "father of lies" (Jn 8:44), who constantly seeks to draw people to broad and easy ways, ways apparently smooth and pleasant, but in reality full of snares and dangers. May we always be enabled to follow the One who is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Concerning such “witnesses”, elsewhere in this section, John Paul II writes: “As Pope Paul VI observed, ‘contemporary man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he listens to teachers it is because they are witnesses’. In the Church, the treasure of the family has been entrusted first and foremost to witnesses: to those fathers and mothers, sons and daughters who through the family have discovered the path of their human and Christian vocation, the dimension of the "inner man" (Eph 3:16) of which the Apostle speaks, and thus have attained holiness. *The Holy Family is the beginning of countless other holy families*. The Council recalled that holiness is the vocation of all the baptized. In our age, as in the past, there is no lack of witnesses to the "gospel of the family", even if they are not well known or have not been proclaimed saints by the Church”, *Letter to Families*, # 23.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. Bill Saunders also quoted portions of this last chapter in his opening remarks to the conference. A segment of his remarks not quoted above bears repeating: “The history of mankind, the history of salvation, passes by way of the family. In these pages I have tried to show how the family is placed at the center of the great struggle between good and evil, between life and death, between love and all that is opposed to love. To the family is entrusted the task of striving, first and foremost, to unleash the forces of good, the source of which is found in Christ the Redeemer of man. Every family unit needs to make these forces their own so that...the family will be ‘strong with the strength of God’ (cf. 1 Cor 7:1-40; Eph 5:21-6:9; Col 3:25; 1 Pet 3:1-7; 1 Jn 2:12-17).”