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Truth and Compassion Revisited

Compassion: Founded on the Truth

To be compassionate—to have sympathetic consciousness of other's distress along with the desire to alleviate it—is considered an admirable quality. Many of you would like to be considered “compassionate” priests. Similarly, many physicians would like to be called “compassionate” doctors. Are we confused about what it means to be truly compassionate? Are we confused about what it means to really help someone?

A truth-compassion dichotomy exists in our contemporary society. Truth and compassion are often treated as separate entities because compassion is an emotional feeling while truth is an intellectual perception. However, they should not be separated. Compassion looks primarily toward what is good for us, whether or not it feels good. What really is good and the truth are not separate. In fact, the ultimate good is truth. The truth is the norm for everyone. But, how do we know something is true?

We can know the truth through faith and through reason, as you likely know better than me. Faith can be defined as “graced intuition.” The Church and Her children are blessed with this graced intuition. Faith enlightens us—it is like a light that allows us to see and guides our way. Many times, we rightly believe things that we can never completely understand by reason alone.

The truth can sometimes hurt or can be very difficult to hear. But remember, what is true for us is also good for us. True compassion for other people calls us to share the truth with them rather than to conceal it from them. If we keep the truth from people, we are not really compassionate and we are actually hurting people.

We must be compassionate with the truth. Being passionate for the truth goes along with compassion for the people whom we are trying to help live the truth. Therefore, we must develop our sense of the truth as well as our ability to feel with the pain of others. We must also be prepared to feel with people when they are hurting. Physicians, for example, may be able to perform surgery and cause hurt or pain, but good physicians are able to feel with the patient when he or she hurts.

First and foremost, speaking the truth is an exercise of compassion. Truth, shared out of love, is the foundation of compassion. Our society has lost compassion with the truth, and it must be regained before more people are irrevocably harmed.

In the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, Pope John Paul the Great wrote about the Church's need to articulate the truth. The same principle applies to the laity—in our case, to Catholic obstetrician-gynecologists. He wrote the following which illustrates the interconnectedness between truth and compassion:

“In fact, genuine understanding and compassion must mean love for the person, for his true good, for his authentic freedom. And this does not result, certainly, from concealing or weakening moral truth, but rather from proposing it in its most profound meaning as an outpouring of God's eternal Wisdom, which we have received in Christ, and as a service to man, to the growth of his freedom and to the attainment of his happiness... The Church's firmness in defending the universal and unchanging moral norms is not demeaning at all. Its only purpose is to serve man's true freedom. Because there can be no freedom apart from or in opposition to the truth, the categorical—unyielding and uncompromising—defence of the absolutely essential demands of man's personal dignity must be considered the way and the condition for the very existence of freedom.” (§95-96)

Wholeness of the Human Person—

Contraception and ART versus FertilityCare

Contraception is a disintegration or separation of the wholeness of the human person. The Church heralds this truth by Her defense of the integrity of the whole human person, which also includes the integrity of the genital union. When a person is integrated, he or she is whole. The act of contracepting creates a contradiction. When a couple uses contraception, they (although they most often do not realize it) actually say “no” to the gift of fertility and to new life at the same time. The act of contracepting compartmentalizes the spouses by giving and receiving only parts of their whole person, while withholding other parts. And, when contraceptives fail, many doctors even refer to or perform abortions.

Contraception is both contradictory and contra-personal. Like abortion, contraception fundamentally separates love and life. The encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* supports us in speaking truthfully and compassionately about the reality

of contraception when it says that “only by obedience to universal moral norms”—like keeping love and life connected—“does man find full confirmation of his personal uniqueness and the possibility of authentic moral growth... When it is a matter of the moral norms prohibiting intrinsic evil, there are no privileges or exceptions for anyone” (96).

When we think of sexuality, we tend to think only of our genital organs. However, our sexuality is so much more. It is who we are as whole people—as men and women designed and created by God. FertilityCare, therefore, allows for our sexuality to be properly balanced so that our total sexuality (not just the genital aspect) can grow and develop and enrich the whole person. Our fertility potential, which is a part of our total sexuality, is awe-inspiring. FertilityCare, unlike contraception or fertility control, respects that potential and allows a couple to maintain their proper role as the chosen agents of God in His creation of new persons. FertilityCare truly allows us to appreciate more deeply our fertility as a gift from God.

With this understanding, we can see how natural methods of fertility regulation combat contraception. What, then, can I do for couples when I know and believe that contraception and artificial reproductive technology are inherently flawed? As an obstetrician-gynecologist who believes that contraception and artificial reproductive technology are inherently flawed and attack the truth and integrity of the human person, I show compassion to my patients by offering them the Creighton Model FertilityCare System, which is a natural method of fertility regulation.

Women using the Creighton Model System learn to chart various biological markers of their menstrual and fertility cycles. This information increases a married couple's awareness of the gift of their fertility. Also, a woman's Creighton Model chart is the basis for NaProTechnology, which is a new women's health science. This information is the key that enables women and NaProTechnology-trained physicians to identify abnormalities in a woman's health. Because of the accuracy of the Creighton Model System, NaProTechnology protocols can address numerous gynecologic and reproductive problems with high rates of success.

The Creighton Model System and NaProTechnology respect the dignity of women, of couples, of marriages and of children. They are holistic and healthy approaches. And, they realize the truth about God's design, the truth about the human body and about married love, and the connection of love and life. They allow a marriage relationship to grow and to develop, and they help married couples to bond. Solid relationships in marriage and family are made strong, not by the genital union alone, but also by the couples' ability to integrate their faith, to communicate with each other, and to see that their marriage is a growing and living and loving excursion.

Needed: Your Support and Leadership

The Church's teachings contained in *Humanae Vitae* are full of love and reveal love. Pope Paul VI expressed the truth about the human person with compassion and with great, great love. It is unfortunate that so many people have spent their intellectual lives dissenting from the Church and from *Humanae Vitae*. This has hurt countless people—married couples, women, men, and children.

But, there is hope! I know that the Creighton Model System and NaProTechnology truly respect the wholeness of the human person. As a physician, it is important for me to show compassion to women suffering from gynecologic problems or couples with reproductive concerns or suffering from infertility. I do this responsibly when I relay what I know to be the truth to my patients. The most responsible thing that I can do is to offer them the Creighton Model System and NaProTechnology. It is the compassionate thing to do.

Faith needs to be nurtured. This is a particular role for priests, to whom we look for leadership. The Church has so much good to offer to doctors and scientists, to married people, to young people, to people who are searching, and to people who are hurting. That good will never be observed by them unless we are willing to share the truth, which is the ultimate good. Let us work to be compassionate. Let us not back down from the truth!



Thomas W. Hilgers, MD

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Almost 20 years ago, I had the privilege of addressing the Omaha Archdiocesan 1987 Winter Clergy Conference in Norfolk, Nebraska. This particular conference was dedicated to the topic of "NEP." Since that time, natural methods of fertility regulation have seen great changes. The fruits of the work of the Pope Paul VI Institute—NaProTechnology and FertilityCare—came to the world stage in 2004. During this same time, artificial reproductive technologies were also taking giant leaps to the point that IVF, artificial insemination, embryonic stem cell research, and selective fetal reduction are now common vocabulary.

The topic for my clergy conference presentation was entitled "Truth and Compassion." The contents of that presentation 20 years ago are still relevant today. I would like to revisit this with the priests of the Archdiocese of Omaha. Hopefully, this revised presentation will serve two purposes: to illustrate how the balance of truth and compassion underscores gynecologic and reproductive medical care that is consistent with Catholic Church teaching and, secondly, in some way to re-invigorate you in your ministry of instructing the laity in the teachings of the Church in these challenging areas.

Finally, the Catholic Church is often the only voice of truth on many controversial issues of the day. This could not be truer than in the volatile areas of marriage, sexuality, and family planning. From our 40 years of research and "field testing" of the teaching of the Church, I know that Her teachings are relevant and really do work! Be assured that you can joyfully proclaim these marvelous teachings of the Church, which are now supported by a strong scientific foundation.

—Thomas W. Hilgers, M.D.

Pope Paul VI Institute Directory

- **FertilityCare™ Center of Omaha**
To learn the Creighton Model FertilityCare System.
(402) 392-0842 or fcco@popaulvi.com
Co-directors: Jeanice Vinduska, Kathy Chervovsky
- **National Center for Women's Health**
For clinic questions:
(402) 390-6600
Linda Cady (Dr. Hilgers' head nurse)

For medical questions:
(402) 390-9167 or tgreen@popaulvi.com
Terri Green (Dr. Hilgers' personal administrator)

Creighton Model FertilityCare Allied Health Education Program

For FertilityCare provider education.
(402) 390-9168 or education@popaulvi.com
Alice Sales

Center for NaProEthics

For ethics questions and consults.
(402) 390-0812 or ethics@popaulvi.com
Sr. Renee Mirkes, OSF, PhD

Access this newsletter online at www.popaulvi.com/connect.htm

More resources can be found on our web sites:

www.popaulvi.com
www.creightonmodel.com
www.naprotechnology.com

Chapel of the Holy Family

Open business days, 8:00 a.m.—4:30 p.m.
Mass Schedule
8:30 a.m. Mondays and 1st/3rd Fridays
Adoration
8:45 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. Tuesdays

Rev. Edward Richard M.S., D. Th., M., J.D.

For ethics and questions
(314) 792-6107 or richard@kenrick.edu

Direct all other questions to:

Sue Hilgers: (402) 390-6600 ext. 149 or suehilg@aol.com.

Mary shares our human condition, but in complete openness to the grace of God. Not having known sin, she is able to have compassion on every kind of weakness. She understands sinful man and loves him with a Mother's love. Precisely for this reason she is on the side of truth and shares the Church's burden in recalling always and to everyone the demands of morality...

O Mary,
Mother of Mercy,
watch over all people,
that the Cross of Christ
may not be emptied of its power,
from the past of the good
that man may not stray
or become blind to sin,
but may put his hope ever more fully in God
who is "rich in mercy" (Eph 2:4);
May he carry out the good works prepared
by God beforehand (cf. Eph 2:10)
and so live completely
"for the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:12)

— John Paul II, Taken from Veritatis Splendor, paragraph 120

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