

Violent Words: Educating for Healing in Digital Discourses

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ABSTRACT: This presentation explores verbal violence in digital communication, on public forums such as comment feeds, reviews, and social media platforms. Digital communication often times yields violent verbal exchanges less likely in a similar context face-to-face: the January 2014 case of the National Catholic Reporter having to turn off its online public commenting feature because of such verbal violence is one recent example of this. Faced with violent word online, Christian communities have a prophetic role. This presentation turns to theologies of communication as a source for religious education to serve as agent of transformation of the violent word toward the life-giving Word in our digital culture.

OUTLINE

-Introduction: Observing and assessing the reality of verbal violence online, especially through the case of excessively violent language in faith based forums.

-The prophetic witness from Christian communities: exploring the theology of communication vis-a-vis verbal violence, focusing on the themes of Christ as Perfect Communicator and the gift of self in communication.

-The role of religious education toward fostering this prophetic witness: considering Theme Centered Interaction in religious education as a process of communication transforming violence toward communal growth.

-Dialogue with digital culture: exploring how these theological and practical approaches to communication do or no dot 'translate' online and what wisdom these bear for the reality of online verbal violence.

MAIN RESOURCES:

The Roman Catholic social communication tradition, with focus on the document *Communio et Progressio* (1971)

Matthias Scharer and Bernd Jochen Hilberath. *The Practice of Communicative Theology*. (Crossroad, 2008)