

John Loflin
2455 Shelby Street #1
Indianapolis, IN 46203

March 25, 1999

Fr. Boniface Hardin
Martin University
2171 Avondale Place
Indianapolis, IN 46218

Fr. Hardin:

During last Thursday's class, you mentioned an issue you had with the new "language" or jargon that is being created on/by or due to the present nature of the internet. It was upsetting to you, and it should have been.

Your concern and your reaction brought about an insight to me. Suddenly, all that the class had been discussing over the past Thursday evenings in respect to violence became understandable. When our language—the necessary network of communication and relatedness—begins to breakdown it leads to the distrust of words and this distrust/your concern for the new "internetese" and how it made you feel is the first sign society is in a particular kind of trouble.

This is because violence and communication are mutually exclusive. Simply put, it is hard to talk to your enemy—and if you can talk with that person, that person ceases to be your enemy.

To me, this new jargon made you feel left out. It just didn't sit right with you. But this issue was only one of many presented. Teacher concern over the behavior and language of students was mentioned. Aggressive actions and an increase in the level of obscenities were worrisome. The bewilderment we felt as we discussed and looked into, the face of violence as we tried to understand slavery or spousal abuse or gangs; the anxiety we felt as we looked in to the face of evil as we discussed a student's interest in Satanism. All was very significant. Then there was the time you shared your thoughts about your decision to put bulletproof glass in your windows at your home. And in general/ the course's underlying concern for and with the future: What will it be? How can we affect it?

All of these issues dealt with power and powerlessness. Our concerns were about our inability to affect change—change in a student's behavior, change in the schools,

change in society and the increasing violence, virtual or real and all to the extent that we seemed to stop searching for the roots of fear and anxiety, but rather fear and anxiety themselves became the enemy.

I had thought to myself that I wish I could take a course on the psychology of violence so that I could understand its roots and finally not feel so impotent over its power and so apathetic about its prevalence.

I knew that if I took such a course, I would have to look into the face of violence and have to confront my own relationship to power or the lack of it. And this was not physical power, but more a psychological power—the power to be able to assert myself, exercise influence on the world, "fight" prejudice, ignorance, or a winter cold.

I knew I could not just think of myself as good so I could avoid any self-doubt or my own aggressive tendencies. I knew I would be unable to conceal my own envy of those with power and what would happen—what would I do if I were pushed, and pushed/ and pushed?

I knew I would have to face the fact that each of us needs a sense of significance/recognition and if it can't be obtained legitimately, it will be obtained, somehow, even if it is obtained destructively. Violence is important.

Violence is not a child of power, but of powerlessness. The members of our class, obviously, are not at the level of apathy or pre-violence. We are feeling only a small part of what someone with no power feels. Apathy is the "stage" before violence. Power corrupts, but so does powerlessness.

We can only begin to imagine the complete lack of significance, of influence, of the feeling of nothingness that is inside the mind and heart of society's most violent.

Power is not the problem. We can't reject power as all bad. When power is rejected, we remove our self-assertion, our good and necessary political activities. The problem is: In order to mitigate the need for violence, we must recognize the underlying causes of the social disease of impotence.

Deeds of violence in our society are preformed largely by those trying to establish their self-esteem, to defend their self-image, and to demonstrate they too are

significant. These needs, by themselves are potentially constructive. Violence arises not out of the excesses of power, but out of powerlessness. Bronowski notes, "Violence is the expression of impotence."

Please consider creating such a course at Martin. I can help. And, perhaps, our class, if so moved, can help as well.

Cordially,

John Loflin