

*Fr. Perozich comments —*

*In one of my parishes I worked with a Vietnamese born priest. His English was good, and at the numerous meetings to which we clergy were summoned, the priest commented to me, “Talk, talk talk too much.”*

*Robert Greving says below, “**Remove prayer and all you have left is talk, talk, talk.**”*

*Greving makes a few comments that could get the reader distracted from his main point. I did not allow those to divert me from his thesis.*

*Prayer, reflection, taking time, fewer words should replace crises, meetings, statements and crisis manager bishops and officials.*

*On a blog site I commented once that some just can’t wait to offer an opinion on everything, even when such opinions are not formed by prayer, reflection, sound theology, slowly taking one’s time before trying to get one’s opinion and name out there, reflecting a real lack of humility. Several bloggers said that I should be voted off the island for that comment.*

*“... the more **rapid** communication becomes, the more **vapid** it tends to become.”*

*end of comment: article follows*

# In Praise of Slow

*ROBERT B. GREVING*



In 1984, film director Philip Gröning wrote the **Carthusian monks of the Grande Chartreuse** asking to make a documentary about their life at the monastery. Sixteen years—*years*—later they responded and the result was the beautiful film *Into Great Silence*. In 1962, Pope John XXIII summoned a council for the “modernization of the Church after twenty centuries.” The bishops dispatched this task in three years and the results were not so beautiful. The lesson: speed kills (or: next time a pope calls a council, put the Carthusians in charge).

St. Francis de Sales said that **nothing done in a hurry was ever done well**. That’s as true of dinner as it is of federal laws or Church pronouncements. The problem is not

so much that **we are “communicating” too much** (though we are); the problem is that **we don’t reflect before we do**. It’s not so much that we’re doing the wrong thing (though often we are); it’s that we can’t do the right thing because as soon as we start to get a handle on that, something else for us to do comes along.

**Not surprisingly, technology has not helped.** As Neil Postman showed in his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, accelerated communication began with the telegraph. From that moment to this, the axiom has been “the quicker the better.” But as Postman also shows, *the more rapid communication becomes, the more vapid it tends to become.*

Anyone who has read C.S. Lewis’ lapidary prose won’t be surprised to learn that he wrote with a nib pen and ink well. He preferred it because it forced him to write slowly; he could think of what he was going to say in the time he had to take in dipping the pen in the ink and returning to the page, and he could only write a few words at a time. **Taking time to think; only a few words at a time. There’s a novel idea.**

**Rapid communication has its place—in war, in police work, in medicine. But that’s about it. In all other areas—personal correspondence, politics, and certainly the Church—slower is better.** We “fire off” an email or text and someone gets hurt. Congress passes a bill spending trillions of dollars in less time than it takes my son to decide how to spend his allowance. Church pronouncements are as trendy as Microsoft updates.

**Some of this is a lack of humility.** If we’re honest, most of us don’t have much to say (says the columnist). And what we do have of value is often said better when it’s the fruit of reflection. A priest I went to for spiritual direction would

slowly fill his pipe and gently puff at it as we talked. When I asked him why, he responded, “It keeps my mouth shut.” Perhaps we should require all bishops to smoke a pipe.

Another priest I knew rarely gave a homily at daily Mass. Instead, he read part of the Office of Readings from the Breviary. At first, I thought he was being lazy; then I appreciated that he was being humble and realized the Church fathers and saints had better things to say than he did.

**The deeper issue here is that lack of reflection is usually evidence of a lack of prayer; really, a disdain of prayer.**

In Fr. Bryan Houghton’s sobering novel *Mitre and Crook*, the protagonist, Bishop Forester, discerns that **the whirlwind that came through the Church hierarchy and clergy in the 60s originated in the poisoning of the contemplative orders, especially the nuns, that started earlier. Remove prayer and all you have left is talk, talk, talk.** A recent piece in *Crisis*, [“Why is the Vatican Assailing Contemplative Life?”](#) by Mary Cuff, showed that this animus is still there.

**This disregard for reflection pervades our culture. It is the spirit of “do something,” busybodyism, and drama. It is why many today are what I call “crisis managers”; that is, they can’t manage unless there is a crisis. These people flourish in politics (of any sort) and the media. They love committee meetings, councils, “papers,” and “statements.”** They agree with William George Ward who said, *“I should like a new Papal Bull every morning with my Times at breakfast.”* **God forbid someone should say, “I don’t know; let me think about it.”**

Pope St. John Paul II did tremendous good for the Church. Yet, by his own strength, he created a problem. The pope must now be a “rock star,” jet-setting everywhere and commenting on anything the media wants to ask him. It may have been that the inability to live up to this was a reason for Pope Benedict’s abdication. And while I disagree with much of what Pope Francis has done, I think the damage would be much less if he, I’m sure unconsciously, weren’t trapped in this role as well.

Now the Church is set on a three-year (at least) “**synod on synodality**” and the result will be pronouncements that will be out of date and littering parishes like K-cups within a year. No one will be converted because of it (and that, by the way, is the Church’s *raison d’être*). Only the printers will benefit.

It is amazing to think how little of what our Lord must have said during His sojourn on earth was written down. Our Lady, too, says very, very little; but she is twice described as “reflecting—treasuring—things” in her heart. I hear another maxim of St. Francis de Sales: **the more you say the less people remember**. I’m sure the apostles wrote much more than what made it into the New Testament; yet the Holy Spirit, Divine Providence, and wise Church fathers pared it down to a few documents that have given us plenty to think about for two millennia.

Word for word, arguably the most influential writing in the history of the Church outside the Scriptures has been the Rule of St. Benedict. It is a slender volume beginning with the words *Obsculata, o fili, praecepta magistri—Listen, my son, to the teachings of the master*. Much of the work centers on telling you how to do just that. There’s no talk of dialogue, participation, or sharing; just listen. Many in the Church seem

big on listening; but it's like the "listening" at a cocktail party; a waiting only to talk.

**I don't know why we're in such a hurry to put out statements and such.** Don't we know what the faith is? Is there really a question on what we are supposed to do? As a grammar teacher, I don't like the phrase "*the* new evangelization." I prefer "*a* new evangelization." Yes, we need to recommit ourselves to the Gospel; but we don't need a new gospel to commit ourselves to.

**Here's a proposal as we close the year dedicated to St. Joseph: let's do it again; but this time let's really imitate this man—and be silent. For the next year (or two or five), cancel all conferences and councils. Limit all bishops, including the pope, to one public statement a month, and that being one he must write by hand. Perhaps priests could limit their homilies to writings of the saints. Then, maybe, when we finally do say something, it would be something worth listening to.**

*[Photo: Wikimedia Commons]*



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