

## On the Internet and Dangers to the Soul

This is a subject which is better discussed in a bulletin insert than in a sermon. While there is no question that the dangers of the Internet apply to children, I think it best to inform the parents, and then encourage and even expect the parents to help their children with it.

The first thing to discuss is blogging. Blogs—short for “weblogs”—have become a standard form of communication among Catholics in the English-speaking world, especially in America. Mr. R. J. Stove wrote a feisty article attacking this phenomenon of blogs, and Internet discussion groups, which appeared in the Spring 2006 issue of *Oriens*, a fine Australian traditionalist journal. He asked the question whether Catholics should be blogging at all, and argues that for the most part, they should not. “...Blogs and Internet discussion groups actually represent a graver objective peril to the Catholic soul than does the television set, which at least seldom presents even the façade of interactivity; and above all, that however noble specific bloggers’ intentions are, far too much blogging is incompatible with a *sensus Catholicus*.”

Mr. Stove admits to having liked blogging at first. The mainstream print media’s “intellectual and moral sleaze would in itself have inclined me towards defenses of blogging...I rejoiced at the speed with which blogs could transmit Vatican media releases and official traditionalist pronouncements halfway around the world before the secular-humanist ignoramus even got their boots on.”

But Mr. Stove points to five factors which seem to be unavoidable with blogging:

1. Addiction, with all its dangers;
  2. Pseudonymity, with all its dangers;
  3. Encouraging smart-aleck sound bites rather than hard, data led, historically scrupulous reasoning;
  4. A general downgrading of language, and of the writer’s role as language’s custodian;
  5. Anticlericalism.
1. With the slightest effort, even with leading a life reasonably replete with interesting activities, one can spend nine hours a day on the Net. Surely no honest Catholic could justify spending that much time in front of the boob-tube. Even so-called traditionalists, who understand well the menaces of TV, appear oblivious to the menaces of the Internet, unless the menaces take such blatant forms as downloading pornography.  
How much time per day can be spent on the Internet? That’s a hard question to answer, but spending an hour on it is easy to do, and perhaps the hour can be well spent. Two hours is harder to justify, isn’t it? Three or four hours seems to be getting into outright sloth.
  2. For every comment that comes from someone with the courage to sign his name, there are 100 that have been submitted under pseudonyms. Not every writer that

uses a pseudonym is a coward, but anonymity is a seed-bed for cowardice.

3. Not only are the comments usually smart-aleck in nature, they amount to little more than ad-hominem attacks. Lewis’ Screwtape could not have devised a more effective means to install mutual hate than what blogs and discussion groups provide.
4. There is a constant temptation to dumb-down everything in this writing. The abuse of the English language (and I don’t mean mere mistakes here) is constant. Anything requiring reflection, correct spelling, or grammar is deleted.
5. If some bad prelate wanted to make the case for the laity not being allowed to do anything, he would only have to refer to many a traditionalist and conservative *Novus Ordo* blog. The level of anticlericalism and sheer hatred for popes is astounding. The resemblance to circa 1924 Ku Klux Klan gutter sniping about satyriatic priests and nuns is repulsive.

I would add a 6<sup>th</sup> point to Stove’s criticism, which is to say that the blogs and lists to which Catholics contribute display a great ignorance of logic, philosophy, and theology. Firing off ignorant opinions about everything is a self-destructive exercise in the vice of pride.