

## A Resounding Whisper

Let's hear it for noise! After all, eighteen million Egyptians can't all be wrong.

Eighteen million – that's how many people pack the precincts of Cairo. They live with one hand on their car horns, their radios cranked and their voices constantly pitched at the max. Together they generate an average output of 85 decibels, almost double the punch of normal conversation and roughly equivalent to living with a running lawn mower strapped to your head or a freight train shrieking along fifteen feet away. Peak spots like the road to the pyramids redline at 95 decibels, up in the jackhammer range and almost reaching the chainsaw region.

The phenomenon feeds on itself. A lot of people make a lot of noise, so each person makes a little more in order to rise above the roar. Then, of course, everyone ups his game a notch to beat the new baseline and the cycle spirals another round. One hack driver explained to New York Times reporter Michael Slackman that while the noise bugged him, he kept blaring his car radio and honking his horn. Why? "Well, to tell you I'm here."

Existential inflation: the more each individual asserts his presence, the less presence each individual has.

Perhaps the solution is for someone to dare to be quiet: "You have heard that it was said, 'An ear for an ear, and a mouth for a mouth.' But I say to you, do not resist a noisy person: but whoever hollers in your right ear, turn the other to him also." Maybe the way for everyone to feel heard is for someone to listen. Silence may offer the only alternative for soaring self-assertion.

A group of American academicians once visited Mother Teresa. "Tell us something that will help us," they asked. "Smile at each other," she replied. The saint's directive demanded the daring to counter professional turf wars with the silent affirmation of a facial expression.

Church can be such a noisy place – crowded aisles of horn-honking Christians locked in a battle of babble. We ramp up our roaring from the secret fear that ceasing to speak means ceasing to exist. Perhaps the Holy Spirit seeks some intrepid saint who will be the first to break the cycle, to smile love in silence and create a space where the still small voice can sound forth.

Say What?  
Doug