



FACULTAD DE TEOLOGÍA
INSTITUTO UNIVERSITARIO DE ESPIRITUALIDAD

**«A sound of sheer silence»:
Interior silence as listening, openness, and
communion**

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Director: Dr. Juan Antonio Marcos Rodríguez OCD

Madrid

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Visto bueno del director

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Después de haber recibido el consejo de mi padre espiritual
entré en el camino de la salvación, armado con la santa decisión
de orar incesantemente.

Pero mi pensamiento, ídolo terreno,
no me permite
habitar en el lugar de Dios,
en la intimidad de mi corazón
a la que tiendo.

Por eso, ayúdame tú, Protectora mía,
a permanecer firme en la invocación incesante, ayúdame, y cantaré:
... Alégrate, Madre de la oración perpetua

-Hesychast prayer

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Abbreviations

Santa Teresa de Jesús

C- Camino de Perfección (Valladolid)

CE- Camino Escorial

Cta- Cartas

F- Las Fundaciones

Med- Meditaciones en los Cantares

M- Libro de las moradas

Rel- Las relaciones

V- Libro de la vida

The works of Teresa de Jesús will be taken from: *Santa Teresa de Jesús. Obras completas*. 10a ed., edited by Tomás Álvarez. Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 1999.

San Juan de la Cruz

CB- Cántico espiritual, segunda redacción

Cta. Cartas

Caut- Cautelas

D- Dichos de luz y amor

LIA- Llama de amor viva primera redacción

LIB- Llama de amor viva segunda redacción

N- Noche oscura

P- Poesía

S- Subida del Monte Carmelo

The works of Juan de la Cruz will be taken from: *San Juan de la Cruz. Obras completas*. Edited by Eulogio Pacho. 9a ed. Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2010.

Introduction

“Every good thing has come to me through silent prayer”. This remark I made a few years back to a friend struck me as a little exaggerated even as I spoke it. Nevertheless, since that moment, the idea has only been reaffirmed by continual experience. When it came time to decide on a theme for a «tesina», I could not think of anything better. As a Discalced Carmelite, the topic of silence has profound implications. The charism of Carmel, essentially shaped by its eremitical origins, should make the Carmelite in some sense a “specialist” in silence. It is the mission of Carmel to cultivate contemplative silence in order to listen to the divine word in the depths of one’s interior, and bear witness to this encounter in the Church and the world.

Silence is also a relevant topic for contemporary times, mainly because it has become a rare commodity. Almost every study begins with an existential commentary on the excessive noise, interior and exterior, prevalent in the world. However, with the advent of smartphones and social media, the noise has become all-absorbing. There is now an infinite variety of stimuli that can keep one occupied from morning until night. Because of this environment, the interior life can become filled with attachments and often unconscious addictions to the stimuli received, making interior silence almost impossible. Also, there is often a general fear of silence because of what a person might discover or encounter in their inner world of thoughts and emotions. Fears, insecurities, and boredom motivate a general fleeing from silence into external escapes. This leaves one even more scattered. As a result, people are distracted and spread thin, exhausted, and often not feeling at home in themselves. In this state, genuine self-knowledge and an intimate relationship with the divine are neither desired nor considered possible. With the harm this causes, people are discovering methods of inner healing and peace through mindfulness, yoga, and other practices. It reveals a general thirst for silence which can be an opening to a more theological approach. From a Christian perspective, silence is a theological value because it recollects the person into an integral unity reflecting the Creator, facilitating an interior disposition of openness and receptivity to the transforming action of God.

On an academic level, silence is a fitting theme for Spiritual Theology. I am guided in my understanding of this discipline through the classic definition given by Federico Ruiz Salvador: «Es la disciplina teológica que estudia sistemáticamente, a partir de la revelación y de la experiencia cualificada, la asimilación creciente del misterio de Cristo en la vida del cristiano y de la Iglesia, en proceso constante y gradual hasta la perfección»¹. My study

¹Federico Ruiz Salvador. *Caminos del Espíritu: compendio de teología espiritual*. 5º ed. Madrid: EDE, 1998, 33.

finds itself mainly within the realm of *la experiencia cualificada* indicated by Ruiz. I will strive to demonstrate how the experience of silence leads one to *la asimilación creciente del misterio* of the divine presence. This *asimilación* comes about both through divine gift and disciplined practice, leading to the authentic human flourishing that is *perfección*.

My objective for the work is to uncover the theological and anthropological basis for silence. Second, this study will show how silence is related to the attitudes of openness and receptivity. This will be achieved by investigating silence in Mary the mother of Jesus, and in the Carmelite mystics. Finally, my objective is to develop a model of a pedagogy for interior silence applicable in contemporary times.

The investigation will cover a wide range of subjects and source material. The experience of the mystics is an essential fount for studying the theme. Therefore, I will use the works of santa Teresa de Jesús and san Juan de la Cruz as primary sources. I have also found particular help through several studies. *The World of Silence* by Max Picard is a classic and emphasizes the positive nature of silence. *From Word to Silence: The Way of Negation, Christian and Greek* by Raoul Mortley is indispensable for studying negative theology. He offers provocative insights about thinkers like Pseudo-Dionysius and their legacy. Another is *Cuando todo calla: El silencio en la Biblia* by Silvio José Báez. I have found no other work like it which unfolds the multivalent aspects of silence in the Scriptures. Finally, one of the most helpful works on a practical level is *Into the Silent Land: A Guide to the Christian Practice of Contemplation* by Martin Laird. He unveils the inner dynamics of contemplative practice, along with its inherent challenges.

One area where there is a lack of literature is in the silence of Mary. I found different studies in my research that touched upon aspects of her silence, but very few scholarly sources looked at it systematically or scientifically. Therefore, I have striven to present a fuller picture of Mary's silence according to biblical scholarship and the spiritual tradition.

This study will take an interdisciplinary approach, investigating material in philosophy, theology, history, and especially spirituality. I will analyze texts from these fields and draw out the connection between them and my thesis. As explained above, spiritual theology is based on Christian revelation, with a marked accent on subjective experience. Thus, the psychological-anthropological component is essential. Because of this and with the wide range of materials used for this work, I will take an anthropological-spiritual theological approach for my methodology.

There are certain areas that I will have to leave out of the investigation. The ecumenical perspective and the theme of silence in the non-Christian religions is a field too vast for a

tesina that already confronts a wide array of themes. Furthermore, it would not necessarily fit in with the theological aspect of silence as openness to the divine presence, which I aim to uncover. Nevertheless, the ecumenical and interreligious element could be a fruitful area of future study. It might contribute to a deeper understanding of the value of interior silence in human flourishing.

Christian revelation and experience show that God is the source of Word. Divine revelation comes through words. The thesis of this work is that along with word, God is also the source of silence, it is constitutive of the divine being. It is from the mystery of the original silence that all words flow. Thus, silence manifests itself as foundational to human nature and community as created in the divine image and likeness. It offers a path towards union with God, openness to others, and authentic human flourishing. One can find this way of silence taught and lived out in Mary and the mystics, especially through their attitudes of listening receptivity and availability to the divine presence.

I will develop the thesis through five chapters. In the first chapter, I will look at the origins of silence, especially in relation to the Trinity and creation. The origins help show that silence is a positive reality that lies at the basis of human nature. The fact of human interiority implicates the need for a practice of silence, leading to communion with the divine inhabiting presence. Silence, in turn, facilitates attitudes of openness and receptivity.

In the second chapter, I will mainly look at silence according to divine revelation, giving it a more theological foundation. Silence is not merely an individual interior phenomenon but is part of the overall biblical experience of the human quest for God. Jesus shows in his life and teaching a deep interior silence. He is God's seal on its perennial and indispensable value. The Fathers and tradition of the Church develop the biblical legacy.

Chapter three will look at the mystical experience of silence, especially discovering its foundational presence in negative or *apophatic* theology. The contemplative nature of apophatism leads to the receptive attitudes characteristic of the mystics. The experience of santa Teresa de Jesús and san Juan de la Cruz help reveal silence as a path of purification and openness to the divine inhabiting presence.

In continuity with the mystical understanding of silence, chapter four's focus will treat the paradigmatic role of Mary, the mother of Jesus. The concise words of scripture present the image of a person of deep silence. By examining Mary's relationship to the Holy Spirit, she can be seen as the woman most endowed with the gift of contemplative silence, yet at the same time supremely active in delving into the mystery of God's plan with her interior faculties. Her attitudes of docility and openness, indicated through the centuries by Christian

tradition, are fostered and nourished by her silence. For this reason, generations of believers have found in Mary a model and guide in the quest for mystical union.

Finally, the fifth chapter will search for a pedagogy of silence suited to current needs. The contemporary challenges to silence will be highlighted, especially the internal obstacles. These indicate various interior difficulties which must be worked out through a slow and steady formation. Looking at the context of the contemplative life will help reveal orientations for guiding people in this area. Also, the insights of spiritual teachers such as Martin Laird assist in unraveling the struggles behind interior noise. Through simple yet demanding responses to this noise, one can clear the way for silence to develop, leading to psychological and spiritual transformation.

Through silence, one discovers a way of living one's interior centered in God. This study investigates the human reality of contemplative silence as a path to genuine communion and human flourishing. A valuable anthropological and theological basis for this communion is found in revelation, the experience of the mystics, and the experience of each person dedicated to silence. The following chapters will seek to unveil some of this reality through an investigation of materials that shed light on a mystery as profound as it is personal.

I. Foundations of silence in divine and human interiority

This first chapter will look at the foundations for the positive dimension of silence, especially in revelation, nature, and the human person. Through approaching the *being* of silence, one finds that it is not merely an absence but is an integral component of reality. Furthermore, revelation provides a glimpse into the original silence present in the inner life of the Trinity and the act of creation. Finally, these conclusions will help show that silence is an integral aspect of God and the human person.

This chapter will also demonstrate the basis for silence and its unique relationship to the *word*. Silence makes word possible and brings it to its proper end, whereas word reveals the value of silence and informs it with meaning. Silence enables human communion and spirituality; it is the capacity for interiority in the person. Therefore, human interiority will be examined as a basis for understanding silence. It will be seen especially in its connection to human communion and the values of listening and receptivity.

1. Word and silence

1.1. Etymology

Silence is a difficult concept to grasp. Many partial aspects can be mistaken for the whole. Before entering into this somewhat dense terrain, it is necessary to clarify the concept of silence by examining its relationship to the word. On the surface, it seems that the two are opposed and that one excludes the other. The etymology of silence aids in elucidating this relationship. The ordinary meaning of silence originates from two Latin words, *tacere* and *silere*.

Tacere, from which derives the English word *taciturn*, means an absence of words. It signifies someone who is reserved and speaks little. *Silere* is the more direct origin of the word silence, having a more profound significance of peacefulness with an absence of movement and noise². It is not opposed to *word* in the same way as *tacere*. Instead, the peace and lack of noise indicated by *silere* are necessary for communication and reception of the word. Patricio García points out that, in a reciprocal way, the root of the term *word* or *logos* has also contained in it a sense of recollecting and guarding³. Already in the etymology of *silence* and *word*, the two are seen in a close relationship of complementarity.

² Cf. Patricio García. *El Silencio-Análisis y Estructura*. Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2004, 13. Cf. A. Mellet and A. Ernout. *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine*. Paris: Librairie C. Klincksak, 1939, 940.

³ Cf. García, 198.

1.2. Silence and cognition

The silence-word relationship originates in the thinking process. Words form thoughts; they are indispensable for normal cognition. Nevertheless, thought can also exist independently of words and language. For example, studies on the pre-linguistic phase in children have shown that their thought is linked to sensory stimuli and body movement prior to language⁴. In this way, one can see an aspect of silence in non-verbalized thinking. This type of cognition does not disappear with the advent of language-centered thought but remains throughout one's life⁵.

Furthermore, processing information and learning are often done unconsciously and in an inexpressible manner. Language and words greatly facilitate this process, but they are not always the exclusive mediators⁶. Alfredo Fierro summarizes this connection:

«Hay, por tanto, pensamientos, representaciones, conocimientos, procesos mentales sin correspondencia o correlato lingüístico [...] El silencio aquí aparece no ya sólo puntuando, tramando e infundiendo ritmo a un discurso que, a su vez, remite a un cierto proceso mental. El silencio ahora remite, por sí mismo, a contenidos y procesos mentales que la palabra no es capaz de tomar a su cargo»⁷.

In the end, silence has an essential role in thought and, at times, even effectively transcends the capacities of word in the cognitive process.

1.3. Reality, language, and word

In a similar way to the cognitive process, silence is also present in the language function of the person. It occupies the same terrain as language and is its base. Joseph Rassam explains: «On ne saurait définir l'homme par la fonction verbale, sans se référer à ce silence primordial qui fonde la possibilité et la signification de la parole»⁸. Verbal articulation shows that all words are composed of silence and sounds. Words begin and end with silence; they are encompassed by it. Silence expresses itself through commas, periods, colons, and other grammatical forms⁹. It is always present as an internal element that renders words

⁴ Cf. Alfredo Fierro. "La conducta del silencio". En *El Silencio Compilación de Carlos Castilla del Pino*, dirigido por Carlos Castilla del Pino, Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1992, 54.

⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 54-55.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁸ Joseph Rassam, *Le silence comme introduction a la métaphysique* (Toulouse: Association des publications de l'Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, 1980), <https://amz.run/53uU.>, 28.

⁹ Cf. García, 77-78.

intelligible¹⁰. Without it, words would flow without breaks, like ancient manuscripts without punctuation¹¹.

The reflective silence which precedes words also gives them meaning. As Patricio García explains: «Las palabras que verbalizan y los conceptos que conceptualizan tienen sentido porque el espíritu ha percibido y escuchado- en silencio- el sentido de las cosas»¹². Reality or *being* is intelligible in itself, but it does not speak or express itself. It is a «silencio primordial»¹³. The speaker must first listen closely to reality by silencing all the external or internal noises that interfere with what it seeks to convey¹⁴. Later, meaningful words can be used to articulate the reality received. Word reaches fulfillment when it ends in silent contemplation of the reality it expresses¹⁵.

Therefore, silence surrounds word. It is the soul of what will later be articulated. Nevertheless, this should not eclipse the essential function of word. Word and language are what make silence intelligible and accessible. Thomas Merton expresses this interdependence:

«A man cannot understand the true value of silence unless he has a real respect for the validity of language: for the reality which is expressible in language is found, face to face and without medium, in silence. Nor would we find this reality in itself, that is to say in its own silence, unless we were first brought there by language»¹⁶.

1.4. Silence and word in dialogue

Silence is also part of the communicative process of language. It forms the space between the question and the answer in every conversation. Moments of silence punctuate every true dialogue. It is very different from those who interrupt each other and do not give space for the other to think or react. Conversations of this kind fail to be dialogue precisely because they lack genuine silence¹⁷.

The intrinsic relationship between silence and word brings about communion. Humans are the result of dialogue and encounter. In a sense, persons are the encounter of their parents,

¹⁰ Cf. Fierro. "Conducta del silencio", 48.

¹¹ Cf. García, 78.

¹² Ibid., 81.

¹³ Ibid., 87.

¹⁴ Cf. Ibid.

¹⁵ Cf. Ibid., 88-89.

¹⁶ Thomas Merton. *Thoughts in Solitude*. New York Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1998, 119.

¹⁷ Cf. Fierro. "Conducta del silencio", 68.

made flesh. Everything that constitutes a person flows from words, encounters, and relationships¹⁸. However, this communion thrives on silence. All genuine encounters alternate with silence, and this, in turn, fosters love and communion. Silence saves encounters from sterility and banality, giving them depth and content¹⁹. Silence forms part of the natural end of dialogue. It occurs when everything necessary has been said, and nothing remains except to be content in the other's presence²⁰.

2. Origins

2.1. The original silence and the Word

The analysis of silence in language and thought provides a concrete experiential groundwork for an investigation of the origins of silence. As with any reality, it must have its basis in the Creator, thus giving rise to the notion of the silence of God. San Juan de la Cruz writes that God is *musica callada* who dwells in the depths of silence and must be met with silence.²¹ In this he echoes Pseudo-Dionysius who explains: «La misericordiosa Causa de todas las cosas es elocuente y silenciosa, en realidad callada. No hay en ella palabra ni razón, pues es supraesencial a todo ser»²². God is the principle without principle, the totally transcendent one whom «no one has ever seen» (Jn 1,18). There is in him no discord nor noise; he is substantially simple, and therefore silent²³.

Judeo-Christian revelation proclaims that in the beginning, «the earth was without form and void» (Gen 1,1)²⁴. Everything was wrapped in silence and solitude²⁵. But this was not an empty silence; instead, it contained the culmination of the positive reality of which creation is the result. «Un silencio concentrado, recogido y poderoso. Las palabras y los hechos son entonces la consecuencia»²⁶. Nevertheless, the original silence shares in the

¹⁸ Cf. José Rovira. "Silenzio nella vita religiosa". En *Dio Parla Nel Silenzio*, dirigido por B. Moriconi, Roma: Edizioni del Teresianum, 1989, 143-144.

¹⁹Cf. Ibid.

²⁰ Cf. Fierro. "Conducta del silencio", 67-69.

²¹ CB 15, 25; LIB 4,3; D 99. Cf. Alfonso Baldeón-Santiago. "Silencio". En *Diccionario de san Juan de la Cruz*, dirigido por Eulogio Pacho, 1068-1073. Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2009, 1068. Cf. San Juan de la Cruz. *Obras completas*. Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2010.

²² Pseudo-Dionisio. *Teología Mística*. Madrid: BAC, 1990, 372.

²³ Cf. Dom Marie-Bruno. *Le silence monastique*. Neuilly-sur-Seine (Hauts-de-Seine): LIFE editions, 2021 (original 1954), 22.

²⁴ All of the biblical citations will be taken from: Holy Bible. *Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006.

²⁵ Cf. Anna Seguí. "Una experiencia personal de silencio y soledad". *Revista de Espiritualidad* 74, (2015): 360.

²⁶ Klaus Berger. *Callar: Una teología del silencio*. Navarra: Verbo Divino 2020, 112.

transcendent divine nature. Therefore, it can be, in a sense, identified with God²⁷. Silvio Baez explores this idea:

«Antes de Gn 1,3, en donde la frase “exista la luz”, como enunciado performativo, da inicio al proceso creativo, todo es silencio. Un silencio que representa el origen de todas las cosas. Un silencio que es metáfora de la trascendencia absoluta y que, en cierto modo, se podría decir que coincide con Dios mismo»²⁸.

The prologue of the gospel of John (Jn 1,1-18) does not explicitly describe the original silence, yet it implies a mutual relationship between Father and Son that is infinite and ineffable²⁹. This silent *beginning* contains God’s plan for all creation; it is a truly life-giving space³⁰. However, the Biblical revelation also produces a kind of silence-word tension³¹. The Evangelist himself gives clear precedent to the Word. Thus, the silence of *the beginning* was always the impetus leading to Word.³² The word proceeds from the silence and carries within it silence. Paradoxically, it is the revealing Word who makes the original divine silence known and accessible³³.

2.2. The Spirit and creation

The God-Word-Silence paradox found in John's gospel will become the necessary material for later theology to explore the Trinitarian life. In this Trinitarian dynamic, the Holy Spirit can be seen as the personification of silent love. The Spirit inspires speech but

²⁷ This tendency to identify God with silence was very present in gnostic systems teaching that impersonal silence was the origin of reality. But in orthodox Christianity the proclamation of the Word and the doctrine of the personal God of Jesus Christ kept the idea of God as silence from falling into Gnosticism. Early Church fathers like Ignatius of Antioch did not hesitate to identify God with silence, as will be explored in chapter two. Cf. Michel Dupuy and Pierre Miquel. “Silence”. En *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, dirigido por A. Derville, P. Lamarche, and A. Solignac, 829-859. Vol. 14. Paris: Beauchesne, 1990, 832-835.

²⁸ Silvio José Báez. *Cuando todo calla: El silencio en la Biblia*. Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 2009, 133-134.

²⁹ Bernadeta Jojko. “Il silenzio del principio”. En *Silenzio, polifonia di Dio*, dirigido por Barbara Aniello and Dariusz Kowalczyk, Roma: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2020, 18.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

³¹ Klaus Berger explains that John wrote «in the beginning *was the Word*» in order to counter the gnostic tendencies as explained in footnote 27. By positing the Word, and later the person of Jesus as the Word, John is showing that it is not impersonal silence which originates all things, but a personal God. Thus the *Word* is the guarantee for a personal divine revelation more so than silence. Cf. Berger, 126-138. Juan Antonio Marcos follows in a similar line: «En el acercamiento bíblico al tema del «silencio» hay algo paradójico, pues según afirma expresamente Jesús, lo único eterno será la Palabra. Serán las palabras. Además, la Biblia es un libro polifónico, un libro de palabras y sentidos infinitos. Cf. Juan Antonio Marcos Rodríguez. *La mística como atención amorosa*. Madrid: BAC, 2022, 22-23.

³² With the advent of divine revelation, silence takes on the role of being the environment necessary for the word to be accepted in its full reality «En este sentido, el silencio se ha de contemplar como hermano de la escucha. Piénsese en el famoso credo fundante del judaísmo, el “Shemá Israel” (Dt 6,4-9). En el Nuevo Testamento, Jesús es la Palabra que ha de ser escuchada: “Este es mi Hijo, escuchadle” (Mc 9,7)». Cf. Marcos Rodríguez, 23.

³³ Silvio José Báez. “Silenzio”. En *Dizionario Carmelitano*, dirigido por Emanuele Boaga and Luigi Borriello. Roma: Città Nuova Editrice, 2008., 793.

does not himself speak or refer to himself (Jn 16,13). He is elusive and blows where he wills (Jn 3,8)³⁴. He fills everything yet remains as if not present³⁵. His silent kenosis lies in existing not for himself but rather for the sake of giving life to all others. He becomes the transparent environment for the Father and Son in their mutual immolation of love. He is the silent «between», the space necessary for their encounter³⁶. Thus, the Spirit is the master of silence: «Il apparaîtra que si l'Esprit est «maître de silence», c'est en ce qu'il est lui-même silence où se manifeste et se donne l'amour du Père et du Fils, silence divin [...]»³⁷.

The silent breath of God that is the Spirit will also be the principle of creation along with the Word (Gen 1,2; Jn 1,3). «La ruah 'elohim indica, en cambio, en modo discreto el espíritu de Dios, como soplo de Dios, principio y origen de toda la realidad creada, energía vital por excelencia [...] Un «soplo» divino, poderoso pero silencioso»³⁸. Creation begins with the silence of spirit over the formless void and ends with the silence of the sabbath rest.³⁹ We can see glimpses of this in the garden (Gen 2-3). It gives an impression of tranquility full of divine life, with God's direct communication coming to the first humans through the «gentle breeze»⁴⁰.

3. The *being* of silence

3.1 Silence as a positive reality

These principles flowing from revelation and creation lead to an understanding of silence as a positive reality. It is something that precedes word and which word embodies and articulates. Thus, silence does not only come into play when language ceases but is a subsisting reality⁴¹. Identifying it with the reality from which Word proceeds indicates that silence is synonymous with being; it can be seen as a kind of pure existence⁴², preceding other posterior phenomena. Santiago Guerra explains: «"el" silencio es un fenómeno primario; no remite a nada antes de él ni posterior a él, porque existe por sí mismo y desde

³⁴ Cf. Dariusz Kowalczyk. "Lo Spirito Santo, presenza silenziosa nella Trinità e in noi". En *Silenzio, polifonia di Dio*, dirigido por Barbara Aniello and Dariusz Kowalczyk, Roma: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2020, 72.

³⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 73.

³⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 75.

³⁷ Benoît Andreu. "L'Esprit Saint, maître de silence". *Nouvelle revue théologique* 133, 4(2011): 587.

³⁸ Báez, 132-133.

³⁹ Cf. Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Silence: a Christian history* (New York, New York: Viking, 2013), <https://amz.run/53uM>, 38-39.

⁴⁰ Cf. Dom Marie-Bruno, 29.

⁴¹ Cf. Max Picard. *The World of Silence*. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952., ix. The very fact that language can speak of it also indicates its positive nature. Cf. *Ibid.*, xx.

⁴² Cf. *Ibid.*, 1.

sí mismo; sencillamente "es" y sencillamente está ahí»⁴³. Thus, it contains all that is universal and most intimate to being, transcending the singular and existing as a common bond in the community of being⁴⁴.

The positive nature of silence is also seen in its capacity to generate knowledge that transcends the limitations of discursive thought and speech. «Refraining from speech allows this kind of exploration to occur, and silence is, therefore, a kind of gap, which is not an emptiness: it is a positive absence»⁴⁵. Silence is the condition and support of recollection from which proceeds all metaphysical reflection⁴⁶. It makes possible the encounter of being with thought, and thus, silence is the light that enables thought. It is the incommunicable act through which all philosophical conclusions are decided⁴⁷. To deny its importance or its essential role undermines the entire intellectual enterprise⁴⁸.

3.2 Structures of silence in the human person

The presence of silence is revealed in the make-up of the human person. It can be observed as a person's first act of being, not as something extra added on; rather at one's core⁴⁹. Some hold that active consciousness is the essence of being human and thus the foundation of a person's identity. Contrary to this, Sara Gallardo states that silence constitutes the continuity of being *before* consciousness. She demonstrates this by the simple observation that people do not slip into nothingness when they sleep⁵⁰.

This essential component of human identity means that as well as actors, people are also passive receivers. One does not give oneself being nor act exclusively from their own resources. Instead, something has preceded a person from which they can act. There is a silent receptivity at their core:

«Este silencio revela la verdad sobre nuestra realidad, lo que nosotros mismos somos, a saber, seres limitados y dependientes en el ser y en el existir [...] Si hablamos del hombre, la primacía la tiene la pasión, el silencio, porque es el modo del acto primero de nuestra

⁴³ Santiago Guerra. "Teología del silencio". En *El silencio II seminario Desierto de las Palmas*, dirigido por Ignacio Husillos Tamarit, Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2007, 51-52.

⁴⁴ Cf. Rassam, *Le silence comme introduction a la métaphysique.*, 53.

⁴⁵ Raoul Mortley. *From Word to Silence: The way of negation, Christian and Greek*. Hanstein, 1986, 250.

⁴⁶ Cf. Rassam, *Le silence comme introduction a la métaphysique.*, 7.

⁴⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 108-109.

⁴⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴⁹ Cf. Sara Gallardo. "Silencio y persona: lección inaugural en la solemne apertura del curso académico 2010-2011". En *Lecciones*, dirigido por Universidad Católica de Ávila, Salamanca: Publicaciones UCA, 2011, 43-44.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*

sustancia: primero recibimos el ser, luego obramos en virtud de las capacidades que recibimos con nuestro ser»⁵¹.

3.2.1. Silence in human life

Furthermore, looking at the phenomena of ordinary human life indicates silence as constitutive of the human person. Infants begin in the deep silence of the womb, while the silence of nonverbal communication marks one's first years. Soon this becomes the silence of listening, learning, and being formed into adolescence. Then, in normal human progression, silence tends to diminish, giving way to life's projects, ambitions, and desires. Later, silence reappears in the serenity of older age and approaching eternity⁵². It will eventually lead to the final silence of death itself.

In terms of communal nature, silence also takes on a key role. Humans are made for communion, for interpersonal encounters. As we saw above, only from silence can true dialogue flow as it is indispensable in receiving the communication of another. Authentic communion demands embracing one's passive receptivity. Relationship, therefore, is possible because of silence⁵³.

4. Interior silence

4.1. Foundations of human interiority in western thought

This next section will look more closely at the interior dimension of silence in human life. Silence can be an object of investigation because human beings have a capacity for interiority. Human interiority signifies a spiritual principle that enables a person to be conscious and present to themselves from the inside. It is the wide world of inner thoughts, feelings, and desires through which a person experiences reality and subjectivity⁵⁴. It is seen as what sets human persons apart from other sentient life⁵⁵. The concept originated in the west through the Platonic tradition. Plato recognized that the person's interior was related to their bodily presence yet had something "divine" about it, enabling them to rise above their corporality⁵⁶.

⁵¹ Ibid., 47.

⁵² Cf. Christina Kaufmann. "Silencio". En *Diccionario teológico de la vida consagrada*, dirigido por Angel Aparicio Rodriguez and Joan Canals Casas, 1655-1667. Madrid: Publicaciones Claretianas, 1989., 1658.

⁵³ Cf. Ibid., 1657.

⁵⁴ Cf. John Crosby. "Response to Juan Manuel Burgos". *Quién: revista de filosofía personalista*, 8(2018), <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/6904372.pdf>, 17.

⁵⁵ Cf. Ibid., 17.

⁵⁶ Cf. Tomás Alvarez. "Atención a lo interior". En *Acompañar*, dirigido por Fernando Domingo and Juan José Herrero, Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 1992, 20.

This trajectory was taken and assimilated by Augustine of Hippo. His thought is foundational for understanding interiority in the Christian tradition. Augustine shifted the search for God from simply seeking him in the objects of creation, to also discovering him in the internal experience of knowing. Synthesizing Plato's doctrines of the eternal forms with the Hebrew scriptures, Augustine begins his logic by stating that visible creation results from an eternal divine thought⁵⁷. Therefore, one must move from the lower sense knowledge of created objects to the higher spiritual knowledge of God's own ideas. These divine ideas are the basis and criteria from which we can know truths and make choices. God, therefore, is the immediate light that enables the human person to know and love anything as true⁵⁸. Thus, in one's internal spiritual processes, a person is closest to God. The more inward one goes, the higher one ascends.

«The road from the lower to the higher, the crucial shift in direction, passes through our attending to ourselves as *inner* [...] "Noli foras ire, in teipsum redi; in interiore homine habitat veritas" ("Do not go outward; return within yourself. In the inward man dwells truth")»⁵⁹.

Therefore, God is the principle of all our inner spiritual activity. The primary search for the divine is within the person. Being present to oneself is also where God is most intensely and intimately present⁶⁰. This thought lies behind the famous Augustinian saying: *Interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*⁶¹. For Augustine: «man shows himself most clearly as the image of God in his inner self-presence and self-love»⁶². But it is not an enclosed narcissistic enterprise. Authentic self-presence acknowledges its total dependence on God, who is its source⁶³.

This God-centered interiority is the basis for much of western Christian spirituality⁶⁴. Later figures such as Teresa de Jesús and Juan de la Cruz will inherit the Augustinian notion

⁵⁷ Cf. Charles Taylor. "In Interiore Homine". En *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, dirigido por Charles Taylor, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989, 127-128. This section of the chapter on Augustinian interiority is mainly a synthesis of Taylor's thought.

⁵⁸ Cf. Ibid., 131-132. Self-knowledge also becomes intimately bound up with one's relationship to God. For, I can only come to know the truth of myself if I am in touch with the criteria for truth which exists in myself, yet of which I am not the source.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Cf. It also becomes a proof of God's existence. Being aware of my own sensing and thinking makes me aware of a criterion that goes beyond it, that is dependent on something higher than myself. Cf. Ibid., 131-134.

⁶¹ *Confessions* 3,6,1.

⁶² Taylor. "In Interiore Homine", 137.

⁶³ Cf. Ibid., 139.

⁶⁴ Cf. Ibid., 140. The notion of interiority is present in Augustine's famous image of the Trinity in the metaphor of the human faculties of memory, understanding and will.

and develop it in their own way, marked profoundly by mystical experience⁶⁵. Their entire spiritual project is based on the supposition of a rich interior space where a person is enabled to live beyond the superficial⁶⁶. For Teresa, this interior space was always bound up with self-knowledge. To access it, one must know that they possess a spiritual soul and are not simply hollow inside⁶⁷. Like the Augustinian outer man, a person is condemned to live an animal-like existence if they do not understand this⁶⁸.

Teresa teaches that interiority is the primary context for the relationship with God⁶⁹. She calls this place of encounter the person's *spirit*. It is the seat for God's indwelling. The spirit of the person is where one finds the divine image and likeness, reflecting infinite beauty and dignity⁷⁰. It enables self-transcendence, overcoming one's creaturely limitations through being immersed in the divine⁷¹.

Expanding on this notion, Juan de la Cruz explains that the only way of understanding the nature of one's interior is through the discovery of being inhabited by the divine presence⁷². When one has arrived at this conviction, they are propelled to enter within themselves. They desire to leave behind all else to live with the divine presence. He writes: *Olvido de lo criado / memoria del Criador / atención a lo interior / y estarse amando al Amado*⁷³.

The encounter widens and deepens the experience of one's inner world. In *Noche oscura*, he describes this vast solitary space:

«le parece que la colocan en una profundísima y anchísima soledad, donde no puede llegar alguna humana criatura, como un inmenso desierto que por ninguna parte tiene fin, tanto más

⁶⁵ Cf. Teresa was greatly impacted by the spirituality of interiority as found in Augustine's *Confessions* Cf. Vida, 9,8. Juan Antonio Marcos Rodríguez comments on the contribution of santa Teresa and san Juan to the sense of interiority: «Juan de la Cruz, junto a Teresa de Jesús, simbolizan como nadie el modelo de una interioridad disidente. Los dos se embarcaron en la recuperación y revalorización del espacio interior de la persona. Es esta una de sus aportaciones más extraordinarias al espíritu humano». Cf. Marcos Rodríguez, 31. Subsequent thinkers in the western tradition will further develop the concept, but an essential groundwork has been laid through the three outlined here. For a synthesis of developments up until recent times, Cf. Marcos Requena. "Interioridad y conceptos afines: Religión y Ciencia". *Revista de Espiritualidad*, 303(2017): 281-293.

⁶⁶ Cf. Ezequiel García Rojo. "La interioridad en Teresa de Jesús". *Revista de Espiritualidad*, 299(2016): 190-193.

⁶⁷ Cf. C 28,10; *ibid.*, 195. Cf. Santa Teresa de Jesús. *Obras completas*. Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 1999.

⁶⁸ Cf. García Rojo. "La interioridad", 196.

⁶⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 204-205; C 28,5.

⁷⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 195-198; C 28,10.

⁷¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 212-215. Especially in the 6th Mansions, where Teresa describes the various spiritual experiences of rapture.

⁷² Cf. Juan Antonio Marcos Rodríguez. "Juan de la Cruz y la interioridad humana". *Revista de Espiritualidad*, 299(2016): 221-222.

⁷³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 223; P Letrilla- *Suma de perfección*.

deleitoso, sabroso y amoroso, cuanto más profundo, ancho y solo, donde el alma se ve tan secreta cuando se ve sobre toda temporal criatura levantada»⁷⁴.

Rosa Rossi explains further the notion of interior space in the thought of san Juan: «Un espacio vacío habitado por la luz que allí penetra sin librar ningún combate con la sombra, sino que la desposa en umbría, en silencio»⁷⁵. Thus, the experience of one's interior space is marked by silence⁷⁶. It is a listening, attentive silence that flows from the conviction of being inhabited⁷⁷.

4.2. Silence in human interiority

Because of the capacity for interiority that distinguishes human persons from the animal world, silence in this realm is most human and authentic. It is why the mystics have a clear preference for treating interior silence rather than external. Discussing external silence is mainly a point of departure for explaining the pacification of the inner powers⁷⁸.

Within the self-presence and transcendence of interiority, silence means an absence of attachment to one's inner noise⁷⁹. It implies that variously conditioned thoughts, sentiments, and desires lose their hold on one's attention so that the person can dwell peacefully in a kind of general awareness or knowledge⁸⁰. Through interior silence, a person can be fully present to themselves and others, especially attentive to the divine inhabiting presence⁸¹.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 236. 2N 17,6,

⁷⁵ Rosa Rossi. *Juan de la Cruz: silencio y creatividad*. Madrid: Trotta, 1996, 55.

⁷⁶ Cf. Marcos Rodríguez. "Juan de la Cruz y la interioridad humana", 236.

⁷⁷ This idea will be linked by san Juan with his concept of «atención amorosa»; a quiet, receptive attitude exercised in love by the person in their interior. Cf. *Ibid.*, 245. The concept will be examined at greater length in chapter five of this study.

⁷⁸ Cf. Aurora Egido. "El silencio místico y san Juan de la Cruz". En *El águila y la tela: Estudios sobre Santa Teresa de Jesús y San Juan de la Cruz*, dirigido por Aurora Egido, Palma: Ediciones UIB, 2010, 212. Marie-Eugène Giralou explains that external silence is important only in so far as it leads to interior silence, synthesizing the teaching of the Carmelite mystics in this regard: «Qu'importe donc le bruit et l'activité extérieure pourvu que le silence règne en ces régions spirituelles profondes! Le silence intérieur est ainsi le plus important. Le silence extérieur n'a de valeur que dans la mesure où il le favorise». Cf. Bl. Marie-Eugène de L'Enfant-Jésus, *Je veux voir Dieu*, ed. M.L. Huet and L. Menvielle (Toulouse: Editions du Carmel, 2014), <https://tinyurl.com/yc2xz9y4>, 429. This will be developed further in chapter three.

⁷⁹ What constitutes inner noise will be discussed further in chapter five.

⁸⁰ San Juan de la Cruz explains this at length in his works, especially in the *Subida*. Cf. 2S 14-16.

⁸¹ James Keating gives a more explicit theological definition: «Interior silence is a disposition that cultivates a state of diminished interference between a [person's] heart and the Trinity. Interior silence prepares [one] to receive and remain in communion with God». Cf. James Keating. "Seminary Formation and Interior Silence". *Nova et Vetera* 10, (2012): 309.

Interior silence capacitates the will to be free from inordinate attachments that inhibit a healthy use of one's attention⁸². However, this does not mean that all interior noise simply disappears. Instead, silence signifies that one can transcend it by loosening the will's grasp on particular thoughts; being attentive to a higher principle- the reality of the other⁸³.

The thoughts which inhibit silence are often centered on the ego. Thus, interior spaces of silence are primarily achieved through releasing one's ego attachment, as Javier Melloni observes:

«El silencio, más que ser una ausencia de ruido externo, es ausencia de ruido interno, es decir, ausencia de ego. Cuando se logra se abre un espacio entre nosotros y nosotros, entre nosotros y el mundo, y entre nosotros y nuestras imágenes de Dios, lo cual permite percibir de otro modo las cosas, las personas y nuestra relación con Dios»⁸⁴.

In this quieting of the ego, one more and more develops their capacity for silence. Various self-centered thoughts and images may continue, but they do not have to force one's inner attention. Instead, they slip into the background of consciousness, eventually having little emotional or spiritual impact. Thus, silence is not merely the absence of movement or noise but rather is the plentitude of attention on a higher source, namely a loving presence. It has been compared to the mutual focus of lovers in intimacy⁸⁵.

4.3. Attitudes of listening, openness, and availability

With the focus on loving presence as the key to silence, certain human and spiritual attitudes necessarily emerge. The first that can be highlighted is listening. Silence provides the environment to listen and open oneself to reality on the divine and human level.

As explained above, silence and word are extrinsically connected. Silence makes possible the perception of reality which the word will eventually express. Before all else, silence

⁸² Rossano Zas Friz De Col. "La parola parla sempre in eterno silenzio. L'approccio di san Giovanni della Croce". En *Silenzio, polifonia di Dio*, dirigido por Barbara Aniello and Dariusz Kowalczyk, Roma: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2020, 134.

⁸³ Joseph Rassam helps us understand that attention to a higher principle is not a question of concentration of thought or mental effort, but rather of listening and openness. «Ainsi s'expliquent les analyses dans lesquelles Simone Weil montre que l'attention est moins effort, tension ou concentration de la pensée, que disponibilité, attente, ouverture de l'âme prête à 'recevoir dans sa vérité nue l'objet qui va y pénétrer'». Cf. Rassam, *Le silence comme introduction a la métaphysique.*, 54.

⁸⁴ Javier Melloni. "La mística silenciosa". *Revista Iberoamericana de Teología* 9, 17(2013): 8. Nicholas Buxton shares this line of thought in explaining this on a practical level: [Silencio interior] es disolver todas las proyecciones que componen el relato que llamamos «yo» y «mi vida». Mantenernos en silencio es estar presentes: sin deambular entre fantasías o recuerdos, sin pensar en esto o en aquello». Cf. Nicholas Buxton. *El silencio interior: Practica de la meditación cristiana*. trad. Javier Molina de la Torre, Salamaca: Sígueme, 2015, 151.

⁸⁵ Cf. García, 51.

means an attentive listening to the being of things⁸⁶. It is an attitude that does not impose one's proper categories and ideas but instead receives. «Hemos llegado a definir la realidad como algo silencioso, siendo la actitud silenciosa el modo más adecuado de acercarnos a ella»⁸⁷.

Silence is a listening to being, welcoming it as a gift that does not come from oneself. It communicates to a person the truth which precedes them. Silence generates the capacity for receiving the truth of our own reality and the reality of all things. «Nos percibimos en nuestra interioridad, antes de apalabrarnos, en lo que somos, realidades presentes a si mismas, y nos percibimos como somos, sujetos. Y nos percibimos también tocando nuestra realidad más íntima llegando al universo, pues en nuestra interioridad resuena todo el universo»⁸⁸.

In the silent listening and welcome given to reality is found the divine presence, whose traces are left in every being that exists⁸⁹. Yet so often, one's ideas and prejudices block the way. One must silence these to hear the divine voice:

«Mientras no nos silenciamos a nosotros mismos, todas nuestras creencias o imágenes de Dios serán meras segregaciones de nuestro yo. Mientras damos por supuesto el yo y sus construcciones, no nos cuestionamos sobre lo que el yo crea, imagina o piensa. Silenciarnos es desasirnos de nosotros mismos para desplazarnos a un lugar originario [para escuchar]»⁹⁰.

This listening, theological silence, if it is authentic, will necessarily flow into one's relationship with self and with others. As Juan Antonio Marcos explains: «Valorar el silencio implica aprender a escuchar, prestar atención, escuchar a los otros y escuchar al propio corazón»⁹¹. It is the state that demands a focus of attention to perceive something in the best possible way. At times it is automatic, the stimuli of the circumstances being so strong that one necessarily listens. At other times it means a real effort of the will to concentrate actively on what one desires to perceive⁹². «Hay que imponer silencio al quehacer del pensamiento,

⁸⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 91.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁸⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 120.

⁹⁰ Melloni. "La mística silenciosa", 15.

⁹¹ Marcos Rodríguez, 24.

⁹² Cf. Benito Goya. "Importanza psicologica dell'ascolto integrale". En *Dio Parla Nel Silenzio*, dirigido Roma: Edizioni del Teresianum, 1989, 99-100. Goya explains some of the psychological characteristics of a deep listening silence: «Gli effetti di questo ascolto, di questa concentrazione di tutte le facoltà in un solo punto, saranno: in primo luogo, una reazione molto più rapida allo stimolo; in secondo luogo, una percezione più intensa e limpida dell'oggetto; in terzo luogo Ascolto integrale una maggior chiarezza nel distinguere una cosa dalle altre e nell'analisi interna dell'oggetto stesso nei suoi vari elementi; e finalmente, il ricordo del fatto rimane molto più vivo, mentre le cose lasciate passare con indifferenza non lasceranno traccia». Cf. *Ibid.*, 100-101.

calmar la agitación del corazón, el tumulto de las preocupaciones, y eliminar toda distracción artificial»⁹³.

Intrinsically linked to the silent attitude of listening are the characteristics of openness and availability. These are the relational attitudes that flow from the practice of silence in the Christian tradition. Fernando Campos Gómez indicates in what consists this welcoming availability:

«Hablar de disponibilidad es hacer referencia a una dimensión muy concreta y específica de la persona. Es una actitud básica que está implicando la capacidad de apertura y donación de uno mismo [...] Disponibilidad equivale a capacidad de apertura a los otros. El «hombre disponible es aquel que está abierto a los demás, que se da y se compromete; el “no disponible”, por el contrario, es el que está cerrado en sí mismo y aislado de todos»⁹⁴.

Silence means openness which gives priority to the divine or human *other* and prepares the ground from which will blossom dialogue and communion⁹⁵. Prayer especially is ordered to this end, making one open to the divine will without imposing one's own conditions. «Pero el núcleo auténtico de la oración está en el disponerse, sin imágenes y sin respuestas preconcebidas, sin palabras y sin pretensiones, a recibir lo que Dios dice y a recibirlo como Él lo dice»⁹⁶.

Silence is the necessary condition for communion between the divine and human levels. As the two realities are so categorically different, silence acts as a kind of commonality⁹⁷. Thus, the believer must take an attentive open stance towards the divine presence, remaining in the present moment⁹⁸. This stance is the way to be available to whatever one may encounter on their path.

5. Recapitulation

This chapter has shown that silence is not simply the absence of something positive such as words or sound; instead, it is the original positive reality behind all words and language. It makes dialogue and genuine communion possible. Through revelation, its origin is

⁹³ Robert Sarah and Nicolas Diat, *La Fuerza del silencio* (Madrid: Ediciones Palabra, 2017), <https://amz.run/53uT>, 99.

⁹⁴ Fernando Campos Gómez. "Formación de los jóvenes para la disponibilidad". En *La disponibilidad de los religiosos*, dirigido por Aquilino Bocos Merino, Madrid: Instituto Teológico de Vida Religiosa, 1979, 153.

⁹⁵ Cf. Báez, 57-58.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

⁹⁷ Cf. De Col. "La parola parla sempre in eterno silenzio. L'approccio di san Giovanni della Croce", 139. When one imposes words, concepts, images, it often serves to accentuate the divisions between the infinite and the finite. Silence protects the encounter, keeping one disposed to God's own way of being.

⁹⁸ Cf. Raimon Panikkar. "El origen: el silencio". En *I. Mística y espiritualidad. I. Mística, plenitud de la Vida*, dirigido por Milena Carrara Pavan, Obras Completas de Raimon Panikkar Barcelona: Herder, 2015, 166.

discovered in the life of the Trinity. This silence flows into creation, especially in the structure of the human person. It is found particularly in language and the cognitive process.

Silence can be understood based on the capacity for interiority, developed in the western Christian tradition by Augustine and further explained by Teresa de Jesús and Juan de la Cruz. From this basis, we can see the importance of *interior* silence. It widens the inner capacity of the human person and enables self-transcendence through the attitudes of listening, openness and availability. To further develop this basis for silence from a theological perspective, I will now embark on showing the foundations of silence revealed and taught through the Christian tradition.

II. Sources of silence in the Christian tradition

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated the foundations of positive silence, especially in the human person. However, these anthropological and experiential elements of silence are also grounded in revelation and tradition. Thus, the current chapter will present the foundations, or sources, of silence in the Christian tradition.

In the Old Testament, one can see the basis for silence as divine creative energy, which also becomes a tool for spiritual discernment. In the Elijah narrative, a positive silence mediates the fulness of divine revelation and breaks one's limited conceptions. However, most importantly, silence in the Old Testament is a resounding call to *listen*. Moving to the New Testament, I will examine the presence of silence in the life and paschal mystery of Jesus. Silence plays a key role in his relationship with the Father and his disciples. Through silence, Christ exemplifies the attitude of open docility that comes through contemplative experience. He calls his disciples to share in this, especially the disposition of listening. Later, in Paul the Apostle, silence is seen as the divine mystery kept secret for all ages until it was revealed in Christ, while never losing its aspect of mystery. I will then show how silence was understood by some of the early Christian teachers, especially those of the desert monastic life. Finally, I will explain how the contemporary Church has continued the tradition of silence and has given us indications for its role in the life of believers.

1. Silence in the Old Testament

This section will look at an overview of silence in the Bible and then specific parts of the Scriptures that emphasize this theme. In general, there is a yearning for silence as a path to human fulfillment and genuine growth in all the great religions. Judaic Christian revelation contains these longings and recapitulates them in the Bible⁹⁹. It is, therefore, the primary source for an understanding of silence in the western spiritual tradition.

There are many types of silence in the Bible. It is a term that has an ambiguous dimension. For example, it can be seen as death and destruction or as hope and confidence¹⁰⁰. The silence focused upon in this chapter relates to the original, positive silence. It is the mystery that was hidden for all ages (Rom 16,25) and from which the word proceeds (Jn 1,1). All

⁹⁹ Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar. "Palabra y Silencio". En *Ensayos Teologicos I: Verbum Caro*, dirigido Ediciones Guadarrama, 1964, 178.

¹⁰⁰ For a good summary of this ambiguous sense of silence Cf. MacCulloch, *Silence: a Christian history.*, 23-58.

God's chosen ones have been predestined in this divine silence and are known before being formed in the womb (Jer 1,5)¹⁰¹.

Positive, spiritual silence is emphasized in the Bible as an object and *subject* that acts throughout the scriptural text¹⁰². It is the power that inspires Hannah's prayer (1 Sam 1,9–19) and puts Job's tormented mind to rest (Job 42,5). It characterizes Moses' reaction to discovering the sacred presence (Ex 2,23) and reveals God to Elijah in the cave of Horeb (1 Re 19,12-13).

Silence is also the environment through which the word of God is transmitted and heard¹⁰³. It makes possible an emptying of preconceived answers that obstruct the receiving of the word in its authenticity¹⁰⁴. Pietro Bovati states that the Bible can be considered a silent book. In the first place, because it speaks to us of silence. Perhaps more importantly, the act of reading the Scriptures also empowers a listening attitude, a true availability, and total attention so that its contents may be heard and meditated upon¹⁰⁵. The Bible creates access to the authentic silence of God, so one can hear the voice of the bridegroom who calls by name (Jn 20,16) and be reassured of the permanency of the divine presence (Mt 28,20)¹⁰⁶.

1.1. The Pentateuch and Historical Books

Chapter one demonstrated that original silence constituted the «before» of creation (Gen 1,1). In this supratemporal moment, the creative spirit of God is a spirit of silence. Later in Genesis, we will see this spiritual, creative silence appear in the story of Abraham's servant, who goes to find a wife for Isaac. When the servant sees Rebecca at the well, the text states: «The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether the Lord had prospered his journey or not» (Gen 24,21). This gaze indicates a contemplative attitude seeking knowledge of hidden things. It is a discernment that sees and verifies on a deeper level¹⁰⁷. It is the only instance

¹⁰¹ Cf. Xavier Léon-Dufour. *Vocabulario de Teología Bíblica*. Barcelona: Editorial Herder, 1993, 863.

¹⁰² Cf. Dolores Aleixandre. "De Elías a Juan de la Cruz, un itinerario del silencio". *Revista Catalana de Teología* 25, (2000): 191, note 2.

¹⁰³ Cf. Pietro Bovati. "Prefacio". En *Cuando todo calla: El silencio en la Biblia*, dirigido por Silvio José Báez, Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 2009, 12.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 12-13.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 16; 10.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 17. James Keating explains further how the Bible brings this about: «The most ready means of instilling interior silence in a man [is] the prayerful reading of Scripture [...] In allowing the Word of God to affect the heart, mind, and will, the [person] is gifted with rest (Mt 11:35), [...] By attending to the Word, the [person] diminishes the disturbance of his interior beholding of truth, disturbance that wandering and stray thoughts can cause. He rests with God so that he can be still from within and not tossed to and fro by emotion. Instead, his affect is nourished by the truth of revelation». Cf. Keating. "Formation and Silence", 314-315.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Báez, 69-70.

in the Bible of the verb *mistäeh*. It translates «to pay close attention or contemplate»¹⁰⁸. It is, above all, an interior silence that seeks to listen and be attentive to God's presence.

In Exodus, we see this spiritual silence in Moses' encounter with God in the burning bush (Ex 3,1-22). The text states that Moses turns to *look* at this sight which causes him silent wonder (3,3). When God speaks to him and tells him to take off his shoes, Moses does not answer anything in return but instead makes the silent gesture of hiding his face out of respect for the divine transcendence (3,6). From this ineffable contemplative experience, Moses becomes the silent prophet who would now need assistance to speak (Ex 6,28-7,7)¹⁰⁹.

We see this invitation to silence again during a confrontation with the Egyptians. Moses inspires the people when all seems lost by proclaiming: «The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be still» (Ex 14,14). The root word *hrš* signifies to keep silence, to be still. Here, an attitude of hope quiets Israel's fears in front of their enemies. It is meant to produce a passive openness to what the Lord intends to work in them¹¹⁰. In the book of Deuteronomy, one finds the core commandment of listening in the Hebrew bible, the *Shema*. Its essence lies in the opening words «Hear, oh Israel» (Dt 6,4). This listening attitude is the foundation for every other aspect of the Mosaic Law. To obey the *Shema* means to confide oneself entirely to God by a listening silence which produces a complete availability¹¹¹.

The commandment *to listen* finds its way into another silent aspect of biblical faith, that of the Temple. The priestly temple worship avoided everything associated with the noisy pagan rites that anthropomorphized the deity. Therefore, all acts in the sanctuary were carried out in silence as the only acceptable form of worship, signifying the pure listening stance of the person before God¹¹². «La única relación posible del hombre con su Dios era la de la pura escucha de la palabra divina transmitida por Moisés. No siendo posible discurso alguno positivo sobre Dios, el culto sacerdotal no podía realizarse sino en silencio»¹¹³.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 69 note 11; 70.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Julio Treballe. «Se oye la voz de un silencio divino» El culto del templo de Jerusalén». *Revista de Ciencias de las Religiones* 29, (2007): 231.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Aleixandre. "De Elías a Juan de la Cruz", 194.

¹¹¹ Cf. Jesús Castellano Cervera. "Aportaciones del Carmelo Teresiano al silencio". En *El silencio II seminario Desierto de las Palmas*, dirigido por Ignacio Husillos Tamarit, Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2007, 147.

¹¹² While there are few explicit biblical texts which describe the way Temple cult was carried out, there are several early witnesses, including a letter from the 2nd century BC which testify to the silent priestly worship. The psalmists and musicians were always in an outer area, removed from the sanctuary. Cf. Treballe. "El culto del templo", 233-235.

¹¹³ Ibid., 234.

We find a striking example of spiritual silence in the story of Hannah (1 Sam 1,9-19). It is the first place in the Scriptures that mentions silent personal prayer¹¹⁴. In the fulness of Hannah's sorrow over her sterility, she could not express any words but noiselessly poured out her needs to the Lord. However, this was not a monologue; instead, the movement of the narrative indicates that it was an interior dialogue of listening and response¹¹⁵. It is, above all, an exercise of confidence and abandonment full of hope in God alone; it is a silence that opens one to the divine mystery¹¹⁶.

1.2. Elijah the Prophet

It is fitting that the silent prayer of Hannah would be directly connected to her maternity, being the mother of the prophet Samuel. He personifies the listening stance towards the prophetic word (1 Sam 3,1-18). Following a similar line, Elijah the prophet has one of the most significant experiences of silence in the Bible. In his theophany at Horeb (1 Re 19, 1-18), silence takes on the form of a direct experience of God, which helps him overcome his limited notions.

In this episode, Elijah had just been victorious on Mount Carmel against the prophets of Baal when he learns that the Queen is threatening his life. Seeing that he is helpless in the face of this danger, his victory turns into a crisis, and he flees, eventually succumbing to despair. Then, encountering divine encouragement, he goes up to Mt. Horeb, seeking God in the original place of theophany where Moses received the law (Ex 19,16; Dt 4,9-15)¹¹⁷. From Elijah's previous experiences, it is an exodus toward the unknown¹¹⁸. Arriving at Horeb, he takes shelter in one of the mountain's caves, waiting for God's manifestation.

«And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire and after the fire a sound of sheer silence» (1 Re 19,11-12a)¹¹⁹.

¹¹⁴This episode became crucial in later arguments for the authenticity of silent prayer. Cf. MacCulloch, *Silence: a Christian history*., 32.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Báez, 112.

¹¹⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 114.

¹¹⁷ Ex 19,16 calls the mountain *Sinai*, while Dt 4 names it *Horeb*. They are likely synonymous and, therefore, often used interchangeably.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Báez, 135.

¹¹⁹ For this verse I use the NRSV translation, since it seems to fit best the original Hebrew meaning. Cf. James Machado. *The confronter, confronted. The significance of Mt. Horeb encounter to Elijah and the prophets of today (An Exegetical Study On 1Kgs 19:9-18)*. University of Innsbruck, 2013., 51. Holy Bible. *New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ, 1993.

Elijah is witness to several cosmic events that formerly signified the presence of God, but he could not find God in any of these things. Instead, the Lord makes himself known precisely through his absence¹²⁰. Here we see an invitation to a kind of *via negativa*, where previous concepts are stripped away to encounter the divine transcendence. Silvio Báez summarizes it:

«La revelación en el Horeb es la negación y la superación de las manifestaciones divinas anteriores. A Dios no se le puede identificar en modo absoluto con una manifestación suya ya conocida, su misterio santo no se puede agotar en ningún esquema conceptual o simbólico»¹²¹.

After these cosmic events, a new divine revelation occurs through a «sound of sheer silence»¹²². This is a positive, inspiring, and creative act. Elijah immediately recognizes the divine nature of this silence and responds by hiding his face, as we saw above with Moses at the burning bush. It is a gesture that signifies recognition of Elijah's limitations, yet a desire to remain in and be open to God's presence. «Elías se protege de aquel Dios que sobrepasa lo que él sabe y espera de él, pero al mismo tiempo permanece en su presencia, abierto, disponible a escuchar»¹²³. This theophany of the sound of sheer silence is God's way of teaching Elijah that he is fully present, even though he appears to be almost nothing¹²⁴. Nevertheless, this *nothing* proves itself more powerful than any previous manifestations. It changes Elijah, leading him to a genuine listening and receptive openness to the divine will.

The text then states that Elijah «went out and stood at the entrance of the cave» (19,13b). Moving to the cave entrance is a symbolic act of transition. It is a movement towards a new locus of revelation where Elijah is led “from the narrow confines of his previous convictions into the vast expanse of divine reality”¹²⁵. From here, Elijah will begin another phase of his prophetic mission by instituting Elisha as his successor and anointing a new king in Israel. Through the encounter with mystical silence, Elijah is enabled to embark on a novel, unknown path.

¹²⁰ Cf. Báez, 135-136.

¹²¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 136.

¹²² This is how the NRSV translates the text. It bases itself on the term *qdl* which has the sense of voice, and the verbal root *demâmâh*, which means to stay «silent», «quiet», «to silence oneself». To avoid the paradoxical language others translate it as “still small voice” (RSV), or “light silent sound” (NAB). Cf. Aleixandre. “De Elías a Juan de la Cruz”, 191.

¹²³ Báez, 139.

¹²⁴ Cf. Mieczysław Mikołajczak. “Il viaggio di Elia nel deserto (1 Re 19,1-18)”. *Collectanea Theologica* 69, (2020): 19.

¹²⁵ Machado. “The confronter, confronted”, 56.

1.3. Wisdom Literature

In the Wisdom books, silence takes on a key role. It precedes and prolongs the word, illuminating the dialogue between God and the human person. It facilitates listening and provokes response¹²⁶. Listening silence corresponds to the passing down of wisdom in the master-disciple relationship. It indicates a genuine openness and attention to the one speaking (Pr 2,2; 4,20; 5,1; 22,17; Sir 6,33)¹²⁷. As we will see in the psalms, this silence is contemplative and reflective in character, drawing one to a more profound interiority.

Job is one of the richest sources of silence in wisdom literature. As in the theophany of Elijah, one of the central themes of this book is a listening attitude that opens one to the transcendent God who breaks previous conceptions. In Job, it is not reason and discourse that reveals the truth about God but listening and trusting abandonment¹²⁸.

In the first section of the book (1-3), Job experiences a chain of traumatic events inducing deep suffering and incomprehension. The speeches of his friends reinforce the traditional notions of a God who punishes and rewards according to a certain preconceived schema (4-26). Job becomes indignant because of the utter contradiction of this schema with his own experience, bringing his despondency to a climax. It is then that God enters the scene and begins to reveal himself. His only demand is that Job listen. During this divine monologue, Job cannot speak a word. Instead, he says: «I lay my hand on my mouth» (Job 40,4). Silence is the only adequate response to the mystery which is being communicated. Thus, God continues with his discourse, and through a silent listening stance, Job begins to change.

This process culminates in with Job stating: «I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you» (Job 42,5). Formerly he knew of God through the traditional religious teaching he had received, represented by the speeches of his friends. Now he enters a new realm of knowledge through an immediate contemplative experience. In the silence of this vision, Job is transformed and can finally accept his own reality. «En esta relación de visión silenciosa y de escucha visiva, Job logrará aceptar serenamente su propia verdad de creatura, se reconcilia con Dios, consigo mismo y sobre todo con su historia de sufrimiento»¹²⁹.

¹²⁶ Cf. José C. Gimeno. "El Silencio y el uso de la palabra en la moral del sabio". *Revista de Espiritualidad* 74, (2015): 315.

¹²⁷ Cf. Báez, 58.

¹²⁸ Cf. Gimeno. "La moral del sabio", 330.

¹²⁹ Báez, 104.

Later in wisdom literature, the contemplative experience of Job finds resonance in the Psalms. They often emphasize a kind of quiet, loving attention, a contemplative gaze that transcends the limits of speech. We see this especially in Psalm 123,5 «To you, I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens». While Psalm 34,5 exhorts «Look to him, and be radiant».

The psalms also accentuate a silence that is interior and yet relational. For example, Psalm 4 commands to enter one's interiority and be quiet before the Lord. In this attitude, one leaves interior space for God where true sacrifice can be offered.¹³⁰

«Be angry, but sin not;
commune with your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.
Offer right sacrifices,
and put your trust in the Lord» (4,4-5).

Psalm 77 also highlights this aspect of silence as the entry to interiority; it is a silence that opens itself to God's mysterious actions, especially amid hardship.¹³¹

«I commune with my heart in the night;
I meditate and search my spirit:
“Will the Lord spurn forever,
and never again be favorable?
Has his steadfast love forever ceased?
Are his promises at an end for all time?» (77,6-8).

The Psalms also express a passing from a mental effort to the silence of abandonment into the hands of God¹³². 131 is a vivid example of this.

«O Lord, my heart is not lifted up,
my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things
too great and too marvelous for me.
But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a child quieted at its mother's breast;
like a child that is quieted is my soul» (131,1-2).

The psalmist has reached a quiet confidence that opposes the inner turmoil of grandiose ego-centered desires. It is the silence of a child who has no other task but to rest on her mother's breast. It is a relational silent prayer filled with hope. Silvio Baez summarizes the attitude of the psalmist:

¹³⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 71.

¹³¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 72.

¹³² Cf. *Ibid.*, 116.

«El orante, más allá de toda actividad mental y de todo esfuerzo personal, vive sólo de fe, amor y esperanza, su relación con Dios en la oración, con un Dios que habla en silencio y que sale al encuentro del hombre en el silencio. El acto más silencioso de todos es precisamente estar frente a Dios, en fe amorosa, pues es la única actitud que nos permite percibir su presencia»¹³³.

2. The New Testament

2.1. Jesus Christ

This contemplative, trusting silence of the psalms expresses its fulness in the person and teachings of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the living parable whose silences are revelatory, flowing from his divine identity¹³⁴. Christ's revealing silence is found primarily in his origins, his infancy- hidden life, his prayer with the Father, his ministry, and the Paschal mystery¹³⁵.

2.1.1. Origins and finality

All the silences of Jesus have as their source and reference the original Trinitarian silence, from which the Word was generated¹³⁶. He is the Logos that proceeds from the silence of the Father and becomes the ultimate self-expression of God to humanity¹³⁷. Just as all words come from silence and lead back to it, Christ will reintegrate humanity and all creation into the eternal, Trinitarian silence of love¹³⁸.

2.1.2. Infancy and hidden life

One of the most striking elements of the Word made man is that most of his life is relatively silent. In the silence of night, he was born into this world, and it passed unperceived. «Noche y silencio constituyen un contexto ideal para narrar la irrupción de la palabra, que se revela soberana precisamente allí donde no hay sonidos, ruidos, o voces que puedan interferir con ella»¹³⁹.

¹³³ Ibid., 118.

¹³⁴ Cf. Alfonso Alvarez Bolado. "El silencio de Cristo". En *El Silencio Compilación de Carlos Castilla del Pino*, dirigido por Carlos Castilla del Pino, Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1992, 167.

¹³⁵ Cf. Carlos Eymar. "Silencio, gemido y musica. Dios como música callada". *Revista de Espiritualidad* 74, (2015): 375.

¹³⁶ Cf. Rino Fisichella. "Silencio". En *Diccionario Teológico Enciclopédico*, dirigido por Luciano Pacomio and Vito Mancuso. Pamplona: Editorial Verbo Divino, 1995, 908.

¹³⁷ Cf. Bob Hurd. "Silence". En *New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, dirigido por Michael Downey, 883-885. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993, 884.

¹³⁸ Cf. von Balthasar. "Palabra y Silencio", 190.

¹³⁹ Báez, 189. The book of Wisdom states «For while gentle silence enveloped all things, and night in its swift course was now half gone, your all-powerful word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne» (18,14-15). The text has been accommodated over the centuries in the Church's liturgy as a reference to the Incarnation taking

In the environment of silence in which he was born, Christ continued to live his life until beginning his public ministry. We know very little about these years; the scriptures mention him speaking only once during this period when he was found teaching in the Temple¹⁴⁰. This lack of testimony does not mean Jesus lived a quiet cloistered existence; he was constantly in the presence of family and was well known in his town (Mt 13,55; Lc 4,23). Nevertheless, the fact that most of his life is enshrouded in silence is itself divine revelation. The early years show us the humility of a kenotic silence that paradoxically is one of the most resounding lessons of the Incarnate Word. «Para tornarse accesible a nosotros, que estábamos sordos, el Verbo introdujo en el mundo, por la Encarnación, una dimensión desconocida hasta entonces de “no estima de sí”, de renunciamiento al propio yo, de apertura y de obediencia silenciosa, de *kenosis* o de vacío»¹⁴¹.

2.1.3. Prayer and intimacy with the Father

One of the essential marks of Christ's relationship with the Father is the silence and solitude in which he carried it out. We see this primarily in the long duration spent in the desert. The Spirit of silence is present there as a divine force that intervenes to realize God's plan and enables Jesus to discern his mission¹⁴². Passing through his time of solitude helped him recognize the world's idols for what they were and overcome the adversary's temptations¹⁴³. It proved his adhesion to God and his filial identity¹⁴⁴.

Jesus continued to live the desert experience of discernment and intimacy with the Father throughout the rest of his public life. The Synoptics describe his custom of spending long hours of prayer at night in solitude¹⁴⁵. He preferred these quiet, solitary places of prayer to all other sites. Here he fled from the idols presented to him of human fame and power (Jn 6,15). This time of retreat engendered continued intimacy with the Father, leading to the silence of trusting abandonment and the total kenosis of the passion¹⁴⁶.

place in silence. Bernadeta Jójko explains this : Questo celebre passo del libro della Sapienza parla del silenzio infinito che opera dentro il mistero dell'incarnazione e redenzione, il quale trova la sua più compiuta espressione nel silenzio. La venuta creatrice e redentrice del Verbo «dal cielo, dal trono regale» di Dio non poteva avvenire se non nel profondo silenzio della notte, quando tutto tace [...] L'avvenimento della nascita del Verbo onnipotente è collocato a mezzanotte e immerso nel silenzio più profondo». Cf. Jójko. "Il silenzio del principio", 24.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Alain Corbin. *Historia del silencio: Del Renacimiento a nuestros dias*. trad. Jordi Bayod, Barcelona: Quaderns Crema, 2019, 366.

¹⁴¹ Emmanuel Latteur, "Silencio de Cristo y Silencio Monástico," *Cuadernos Monásticos* 41 (1977), <https://rb.gy/dyvomt>, 2-3.

¹⁴² Cf. Silvio José Báez. "El Desierto en el Nuevo Testamento". *Teresianum* 55, (2004): 318.

¹⁴³ Cf. Bolado. "El silencio de Cristo", 170.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Báez. "El Desierto", 319.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Lc 6,12, Mc 1,35.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Latteur, "Silencio de Cristo y Silencio Monástico.", 5.

«Este silencio en la oración de Jesús es silencio de toda su existencia porque es entrega total al Padre, es renuncia de sí mismo, es kenosis, abandono total en confianza, es el silencio del niño en brazos de su madre, que acalla todo deseo y se deja llevar por los brazos de la voluntad del Padre hasta el extremo del silencio de su muerte por la salvación de todos»¹⁴⁷.

2.1.4. In Jesus' ministry to his disciples

Luke relates how Christ chose his disciples after a night of silent, solitary prayer (6,12-13). Throughout his time with them, he will continue to emphasize the importance of silence in various ways. He especially stressed the need for a listening attitude¹⁴⁸. It is the essential characteristic of a disciple, for in this moment they have nothing to teach but everything to learn¹⁴⁹. This listening stance is needed so they will not interpret Jesus through their own categories and, thus, misunderstand his mission. The tendency to misinterpret is also why he imposed silence on them in regard to his identity (Mc 8,30). They will not fully understand him until they are open to the reality of the paschal mystery¹⁵⁰.

In the same way, that silence engenders Christ's intimacy with the Father, so silence is also the path for the disciples' intimacy with Jesus. For this reason, he accompanies them to desert places. «Jesús convoca a los suyos en un lugar de quietud y de descanso para afianzar con ellos los vínculos de afecto y de amistad»¹⁵¹. Finally, he desires for them an inner silence that will pacify their fears and all the inner disturbances which inhibit their trust. (Mt 8,26; Lc 5,10; 8,50; 12,4; Jn 6,19).

2.1.5. In the Paschal Mystery

Christ's silence finds its fulfillment in his *pasch*. It comes to realization, especially when he is before his accusers (Mt 26,62-63; Mt 27,13-14; Mc 14,60), confirming his identity as the silent suffering servant (Is 53,7)¹⁵². It signifies a deep kenosis, denying himself the legitimate right to self-defense. In this case, it is also a silence of love, as his defense would mean that his accusers would be rendered guilty. He is unwilling that his innocence be the occasion of someone else's condemnation¹⁵³.

¹⁴⁷ Kaufmann. "Silencio", 1660.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Mt 7:24–25; 13:18. Mc 4:9; 12:29–30. Lc 6:27–28; 14:35. Jn 5:24; 8:47.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Bruno Moriconi. "«Segreto Messianico» e sequela silenziosa". En *Dio Parla Nel Silenzio*, dirigido por B. Moriconi, Roma: Edizioni del Teresianum, 1989, 206.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 204-209.

¹⁵¹ Báez. "El Desierto", 321.

¹⁵² Cf. MacCulloch, *Silence: a Christian history.*, 44.

¹⁵³ Cf. Báez, 190-191.

On the cross, the kenotic love between the Father and the Son expresses itself now within Christ's death¹⁵⁴. The silence of the Father leaves the Son in abandonment, and the silence of the Son accepts death in loving obedience¹⁵⁵. At this moment, Jesus does not verbalize his final cry; it is a prayer that is deeper than words (Mc 15,37; Rm 8, 26). It expresses a total surrender and absolute confidence in the Father¹⁵⁶. After this cry, silence reigns, leading into the mysterious descent of Holy Saturday¹⁵⁷.

There are no reported words expressing how Jesus' bodily resurrection took place. It, too, occurred in silence. However, it becomes a word of unbreakable hope in the new heavens and new earth. It is the final word of God about history and each human life¹⁵⁸. At Pentecost, there is a definitive link between the silent spirit hovering over the waters at the Creation, which God breathed into the first man (Gen 1,2; 2,7), and the Risen Jesus breathing the silent Spirit onto his disciples (Jn 20, 21-23)¹⁵⁹. The Holy Spirit is sent from the eternal silence of the Father and the Son. The Spirit transmits the mysterious Word welcomed in listening faith, leading to a total openness to the divine presence¹⁶⁰.

2.2. Letters of St Paul

St Paul outlines the mystery of the divine silence revealed in Christ in three parallel texts (Rom 16,25; Col 1,26; Eph 3,9)¹⁶¹. In Rom 16,25, he speaks of the «mystery which was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed [...] and made known to all nations». The scripture seems to signify that the divine silence has been broken, revealing all the contents of the mystery. However, Jesús Delgado points out that the Greek word form utilized indicates that revelation and silence are maintained in a congruous manner.

«Da a entender que Dios es el único responsable de esa realidad que llamamos "misterio" en su doble aspecto: verdad escondida y luego revelada. Conjugado al participio pasado, el verbo

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Rino Fisichella. "Silencio". En *Diccionario de Teología Fundamental*, dirigido por Rino Fisichella, René Latourelle, and S. Pié-Ninot, 1368-1375. Madrid: Paulinas, 1992, 1373.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Báez, 191-192.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Carlos Castilla del Pino et al. *El Silencio Compilación de Carlos Castilla del Pino*. ed. Alianza Universidad, 2ª ed. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1992, 179.

¹⁵⁷ In Christian tradition, the mystery of Holy Saturday has always been connected with silence. In the office of readings of the liturgy for this day, the Church prays: «Something strange is happening — there is a great silence on earth today, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep».

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Báez, 191-192.

¹⁵⁹ Jojko. "Il silenzio del principio", 28.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Báez. "Silenzio", 796. As san Juan de la Cruz explains it, «y en silencio ha de ser oída del alma» Cf. D 99.

¹⁶¹ Rom 16,25: «according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages»; Col 1,26: «the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints», Eph 3,9: «and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things».

expresa que el silencio no es una etapa relegada al pasado, sino que desde el pasado sigue todavía en vigencia»¹⁶².

Paul continues to develop the theme of silence when he speaks about the peace that surpasses all understanding and conquers all anxieties (Fil 4,7). Peace is a fruit of the Spirit who prays in us, silencing our human language with groans deeper than words (Rom 8,26). In this same spirit, we quiet our fallen human sentiments to take on the sentiments of Jesus. It leads us to practice Christ's kenosis in stripping the ego for the sake of the other (Fil 2, 4-8)¹⁶³.

Paul was left speechless while raptured into heaven, hearing *ineffable words* (2 Cor 2,4). He is committed to quiet order in the face of noisy enthusiasts prone to division (1 Cor 1, 1-7)¹⁶⁴. He wants his communities to obey the authorities and, thus, live a peaceful, quiet life (1 Tim 2,2). He says that Christians should work in silence, not going about in gossip and idleness (2 Tes 3,11). Finally, Paul praises the quiet, peaceful fruits of the spirit in contrast to the tumultuous works of the flesh (Gal 5, 19-24)¹⁶⁵.

3. Silence in the Fathers

The Church Fathers are another primary source of the Christian tradition of silence. One of the earliest to comment on the theme is Ignatius of Antioch. He explains that the greatest mysteries of Christ were worked in silence and secret. «And from the prince of this world were hidden Mary's virginity and her childbearing, in like manner too the death of the Lord. Three mysteries are these for open proclamation, wrought in God's silence»¹⁶⁶.

Ignatius also teaches the notion of the *original silence* of God. He states: «Jesus Christ His Son, who is His eternal Word, proceeding forth from silence»¹⁶⁷. Thus, Christ is the

¹⁶² Jesús Delgado. "El silencio, lenguaje revelador del misterio de Cristo en el evangelio de Marcos: Un estudio exegetico-teológico". *Ecclesiastica Xaveriana* 24, 2(1974): 202. Dariusz Kowalczyk states how the revealed mystery continues in a dynamic of silence-mystery-silence: «Questo, però, non vuol dire che il Mistero si è autosciolto e non sia più mistero, perché il Mistero che si rivela continua ad esserlo e la parola, a partire dal Mistero, non scioglie il suo silenzio ma lo ridimensiona nella tensione creativa silenzio-parola-silenzio». Cf. Kowalczyk. "Lo Spirito Santo, presenza silenziosa nella Trinità e in noi", 71.

¹⁶³ Cf. Sarah and Diat, *La Fuerza del silencio.*, 53.

¹⁶⁴ MacCulloch, *Silence: a Christian history.*, 51-54.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ Ephesians 19. J.H. Srawley. *The epistles of st. Ignatius [tr.] by J.H. Srawley.* London: Macmillan Company, 1919, 50.

¹⁶⁷ Magnesians 8. *Ibid.*, 58. Some manuscripts change the meaning entirely and read: «Jesus Christ His Son, who is His eternal Word, *not* proceeding forth from silence», but in context with the above and many of other Ignatius' writings the word "not" seems to be a later addition serving as a defense against a Valentinian Gnosticism which equated God with silence. A. Marmodoro maintains that the original reading was an affirmation that the Word proceeded from the silence. Cf. A. Marmodoro and J. Hill. *The Author's Voice in Classical and Late Antiquity.* Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2013, 352-353.

expression of the Father's silence, manifesting itself as word yet still working in *silence*. This notion will form the basis of Ignatius' treatment of bishops.

«The deeds which He [Christ] has done in silence are worthy of the Father. He [the bishop] who is truly master of the spoken word of Jesus is able also to listen to His silence, that he may be perfect, and so may act by his speech, and be understood by his silence»¹⁶⁸.

For Ignatius, the bishop is known as a representative of God primarily by his silence¹⁶⁹. For, if silence is one of the attributes of God, then the more the bishop is silent, the more similar he is to God¹⁷⁰. He further states, «And so far as a man sees a bishop keeping silence, let him hold him all the more in reverence»¹⁷¹. Later in the letter to the Philadelphians, he adds: «For I have been amazed at his [the bishop's] forbearance who by his silence effects more than those who speak»¹⁷².

Another early father who teaches similarly is the third-century bishop, Clement of Alexandria. In his treatise, the *Stromata*, Clement highlights the importance of silent prayer for a silent God:

Though whispering, consequently, and not opening the lips, we speak in silence [...] For God hears continually all the inward converse. So also, we raise the head and lift the hands to heaven [...] following the eagerness of the spirit directed towards the intellectual essence; and endeavouring to abstract the body from the earth¹⁷³.

For Clement, silent prayer is inward contact with God. Verbal prayer is insufficient; one must rise to the divine essence, removed from all sense knowledge. Words are connected to the senses, so the most authentic prayer is silence¹⁷⁴.

Some of the most eloquent examples of silence in the early Church are found in the Desert Fathers. In their eremitical lifestyle they sought *hesychia*, which can be defined as: «el profundo silencio interior alcanzado a través del silencio exterior, la tranquilidad divina del alma donde mora Dios, la oración continua mediante la custodia de los sentidos y los pensamientos»¹⁷⁵. One of the first sayings we have in this regard is from Anthony of Egypt:

¹⁶⁸ Ephesians 15. Srawley, 48. Cf. Henry Chadwick. "The Silence of Bishops in Ignatius". *The Harvard Theological Review* 43, 2(1950): 169.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Chadwick. "The Silence of Bishops", 171.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 171-172.

¹⁷¹ Ephesians 6. Srawley, 42.

¹⁷² Philadelphians 1. *Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁷³ *Stromata* 7,7.A. Roberts. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A. D. 325 Volume II*. New York: Cosimo, 2007, 536. Cf. Raoul Mortley. "The Theme of Silence in Clement of Alexandria". *The Journal of Theological Studies* 24, 1(1973): 201-202.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Mortley. "Silence in Clement of Alexandria", 202-203.

¹⁷⁵ Ramón Teja. "Fuge, tace, quiesce: el silencio de los Padres del desierto". *Revista de Ciencias de las Religiones* 19, (2007): 205.

«Chi siede nel deserto per custodire la quiete con Dio è liberato da tre guerre, quella dell'udire, quella del parlare e quella del vedere; ne rimane una sola, quella del cuore»¹⁷⁶. The early hermit Arsenio heard the Lord's voice which told him: «Arsenio, huye, calla, practica la hesychia. De estas raíces nace la posibilidad de no pecar»¹⁷⁷. The ascetic quest of these early hermits was, above all, a search for silence, both exterior, and interior, for the sake of divine communion¹⁷⁸.

Hesychasm as a *movement* blossomed from this deep search for spiritual silence. It consisted of the simplification of prayer, made generally through short ejaculatory phrases. These engender a stilling of discursive thought. They help facilitate a silence of the heart to live consciously in the divine presence¹⁷⁹. «La concentración [...] controla cada pensamiento que emerge, de tal modo que la mente pueda vivir en la conciencia continua de la presencia de Dios»¹⁸⁰.

Hesychasm was developed more formally by St John Climacus in the seventh century, who coined the term “Jesus Prayer” for the short, repeated phrases. He taught his disciples this practice as a way to inner stillness¹⁸¹. Hesychasm's leading theological proponent was the 14th-century monk and bishop Gregory of Palamas. He taught that through *hesychia*, one could have an immediate experience of God. He would develop a theological system to undergird his spiritual doctrine, basing itself on *uncreated divine energies* that God communicates in silence to the faithful Hesychast.¹⁸² The doctrine of the Hesychasts was later compiled into the well-known compendium of Eastern Christian spirituality, the *Philokalia*, and the 19th-century narrative account, *Way of the Pilgrim*¹⁸³.

¹⁷⁶ Michelina Tenace. "Il silenzio nella vita monastica". En *Silenzio, polifonia di Dio*, dirigido por Barbara Aniello and Dariusz Kowalczyk, Roma: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2020, 128.

¹⁷⁷ Teja. "Fuge, tace, quiesce", , 205. A few other striking sayings in this regard are the following: *Apa Pastor decía: "Cualesquiera que sean tus penas, la victoria sobre ellas está en el silencio". Apa Andrés solía decir: "Tres cosas son necesarias al monje: xeniteia, pobreza y silencio". Un hermano que vivía con otros hermanos preguntó a apa Besarión: "¿Qué debo hacer?". Le dijo el anciano: "Calla y no te midas a ti mismo". Cf. Ibid., 206.*

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Ibid., 207 and MacCulloch, *Silence: a Christian history.*, 85.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. C. Wagenaar. "Hesicasmo". En *Diccionario de la Mística*, dirigido por Peter Dinzelbacher, 488-489. Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2000, 488.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 489. We also see in the Hesychasts, as taught by Gregory, that the body has a principal role to play in this experience. Through certain techniques of posture and breathing inner silence is fostered and prayer becomes deeper. This connection will be explored in chapter 5 of this study. Cf: Ronald Zawilla. "Hesychasm". En *New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, dirigido por Michael Downey, 471-473. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993, 472.

¹⁸¹ Cf. Zawilla. "Hesychasm", 471. The most common form is: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.*

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Cf. Ibid., 473.

Apart from the spiritual search, early Christian writers will also emphasize the ineffability of God, defining it as the failure of words to adequately capture the divine reality. Augustine of Hippo states that God's word is beyond all other words: «En el principio era la Palabra. Esto sólo puede entenderse sin palabras; no se entiende con palabras humanas»¹⁸⁴. In his work *Teología Mística*, Pseudo-Dionysius will develop the theme in the Hellenistic tradition of negative theology. He counsels the silence of ineffability as a way to purify limited notions of the divine, becoming the highest praise one can offer¹⁸⁵. Later, Thomas Aquinas will synthesize this Augustinian and Dionysian line. He teaches that we honor God's ineffability through our silence: «venerates indicibilia deitatis casto silentio, quodquidem dicit, quia occulta per hoc veneramur quod ea non scrutamur et ineffabilia per hoc quod ea silemus»¹⁸⁶.

4. Silence in the contemporary teaching of the Church

Moving from the Fathers as an early font of teaching on silence, we will now look at the Magisterium of the contemporary Church. In the last several decades, many within Catholicism have called for a renewed theology and catechesis nourished on genuine spirituality. Without this, teachings and dogma lose their transformative power¹⁸⁷. The Second Vatican Council sought to respond to this challenge, as did much post-conciliar teaching. Thus, silence has been incorporated into magisterial teaching in various ways as an essential component of spirituality. For example, the decree on the Church in the Modern World of the Second Vatican Council bears witness to the need for silence. It highlights the problem of noise and division within the person's interior, which silence helps reintegrate¹⁸⁸. At the same time, the decree on the renewal of Religious Life states that the Church must greatly esteem communities whose members dedicate themselves to silence and solitude¹⁸⁹.

¹⁸⁴ César Izquierdo. "Palabra (y silencio) de Dios". *Scripta Theologica* 41, 3(2009): 951. Cf. Agustín, En in Ps 99, 6.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Mortley, 8. The thought of Dionysius and the tradition of negative theology will be further developed in chapter three.

¹⁸⁶ My translation: «Venerating the unspeakable things of the Godhead in a chaste silence. Thus, we honor those hidden things by the fact that we do not search them. We venerate the unspeakable things by the fact that we are silent». In *De divinis nominibus*, Cap. 1, 2,3. Cf. Izquierdo. "Palabra (y silencio) de Dios", 953.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Sebastian Painadath. "La fuerza transformadora del silencio contemplativo". *Concilium* 363, November(2015): 35. Balthasar proposed an early version of this idea Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar. "Teología y Santidad". En *Verbum Caro*, dirigido por Hans Urs von Balthasar, Ediciones Encuentro, 2001, 195-219.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Vatican II documents, "Gaudium et Spes " (1965), https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html, 10. This idea will be explored later in chapter five.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Vatican II documents, "Perfectae Caritas," (1965), https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_perfectae-caritatis_sp.html, 7.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church also contains important teachings on this theme. First, it highlights Abraham as a model believer who worships in deeds and silence before using words¹⁹⁰. In highlighting the hidden life of Jesus, the Catechism states that silence is the first lesson his life gives us; therefore, we should esteem silence highly¹⁹¹. Finally, the Catechism explains that the silence of Jesus is continual teaching for us, both in the life at Nazareth and in being the silent suffering servant¹⁹².

Next, the Catechism treats hermits who devote themselves to silence as a critical element of the Church's life¹⁹³. Then, in terms of prayer, it states that God hears silent prayer and the wonder which accompanies it¹⁹⁴. Finally, in its section on contemplation, the Catechism describes the Christological content of silence:

«Contemplative prayer is *silence*, the “symbol of the world to come” or “silent love.” [...] In this silence, unbearable to the “outer” man, the Father speaks to us his incarnate Word, who suffered, died, and rose; in this silence, the Spirit of adoption enables us to share in the prayer of Jesus»¹⁹⁵.

The last several popes have also had significant contributions to the teaching on silence. Pope St. Paul VI described it as the great need of contemporary men and women: «The search for intimacy with God involves the truly vital need of a silence embracing the whole being [...] Faith, hope and a love for God which is open to the gifts of the Spirit, and a brotherly love which is open to the mystery of others, carry with them an imperative need for silence»¹⁹⁶. Later, in a general audience he stated further about the need for interior silence for the sake of openness to God's presence: «Es necesario el silencio interior para escuchar la palabra de Dios, para experimentar la presencia, para sentir la vocación de Dios»¹⁹⁷.

This emphasis on interior silence found continuity in the life and teachings of Pope St. John Paul II. He was frequently observed entering into deep silent prayer amid large crowds and events, seemingly oblivious to what was happening around him. The human person's capacity for interiority was also a perennial theme for the pope. When he visited Santiago Compostela for World Youth Day, he told the young people: «El mayor mal de la sociedad

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1996), https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM., par. 2570.

¹⁹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 533.

¹⁹² Cf. *Ibid.*, 561; 608.

¹⁹³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 920.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 2616; 2628.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2717.

¹⁹⁶ Pope St. Paul VI, *Evangelica testificatio* (1971), https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/es/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19710629_evangelica-testificatio.html., 46

¹⁹⁷ *General audience* May 17, 1972. Cf. Nicolás Caballero. *Dentro tú eres silencio*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Claretiana, 1999, 99.

actual es la falta de interioridad»¹⁹⁸. In his Apostolic Letter *Orientale Lumen*, he describes the silence needed for the sake of interiority:

«We must confess that we all have need of this silence, filled with the presence of him who is adored [...] This is what man needs today; he is often unable to be silent for fear of meeting himself, of feeling the emptiness that asks itself about meaning; man, who deafens himself with noise. All, believers and non-believers alike, need to learn a silence that allows the Other to speak when and how he wishes, and allows us to understand his words»¹⁹⁹.

In continuity with the thought of the Church Fathers, Pope Benedict XVI urges an education in silence. It will allow the divine Word to enter the interior of the world and each person.

«The word, in fact, can only be spoken and heard in silence, outward and inward. Ours is not an age which fosters recollection; at times one has the impression that people are afraid of detaching themselves, even for a moment, from the mass media. For this reason, it is necessary nowadays that the People of God be educated in the value of silence. Rediscovering the centrality of God's word in the life of the Church also means rediscovering a sense of recollection and inner repose. The great patristic tradition teaches us that the mysteries of Christ all involve silence. Only in silence can the word of God find a home in us»²⁰⁰.

Pope Francis takes up the theme in the Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*, where he teaches about the need for silence in discernment, helping one to hear the Lord's voice and interpret what it means for their life:

«The Lord speaks to us in a variety of ways, at work, through others, and at every moment. Yet we simply cannot do without the silence of prolonged prayer, which enables us better to perceive God's language, to interpret the real meaning of the inspirations we believe we have received, to calm our anxieties and to see the whole of our existence afresh in his own light»²⁰¹.

Following the ancient maxim, *Lex orandi, lex credendi*, in the liturgy, we find another important source for Church teaching on silence. There are certain moments in liturgical worship where silence is expressly called for. The guidelines for the celebration of mass state that people are to be invited to silence at the opening prayer. This helps them to be conscious of the presence of God and call their petitions to mind²⁰². Next, the instructions ask that the assembly recollect themselves silently during the penitential rite. After the

¹⁹⁸ Gallardo. "Silencio y persona", 32.

¹⁹⁹ Pope St. John Paul II, "Orientale Lumen," (1995), https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1995/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19950502_orientale-lumen.html, 16.

²⁰⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, "Verbum Domini," (2010), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini.html, 66.

²⁰¹ Pope Francis, "Christus Vivit," (2019), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html, 283.

²⁰² Cf. Joseph Dougherty. "Silence in the Liturgy". *Worship* 69, 2(1995): 146.

readings and homily, the people are to practice silence to listen and meditate on the word. Finally, there must be time for silent adoration and thanksgiving after communion²⁰³. These rubrics and the magisterial teachings seen above indicate the contemporary Church's valuing of silence, especially as the space for genuine listening. This blossoms into silence's contemplative and interior dimensions.

5. Recapitulation

This chapter has progressed chronologically, but I will summarize the overall themes explored throughout. The reality of silence is seen from biblical revelation, culminating in Jesus. It continues through the Fathers and the Magisterium. These are the various roles it plays. First, silence is a mystery that contains and communicates God's secret, ineffable designs. It is a positive, spiritual reality that is creative and fruitful. It blossoms into openness in the person and leads one to new paths. Next, it enables interior discernment and sincere dialogue with God. Its most important aspect perhaps is the ability it gives to listen and heed the divine commands. Another theme seen is the silence that breaks limited models, clearing one of preconceived answers. Finally, silent kenosis empties the ego so that one can be transformed anew and be available for the task at hand.

On a more subjective level, silence is a hopeful attitude of abandonment that calms fears and gives confidence. It gives rise to a more profound experience of interiority, opening one to an inhabiting presence. This openness fosters the contemplative attitudes of listening and receptivity. In the next chapter, I will draw out this contemplative, relational aspect further through the experience of the mystics.

²⁰³ Cf. Catholic Church, *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (2002), https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20030317_ordinamento-messale_en.html, 45.

III. Silence in the mystics

The significant themes of silence found in the Christian tradition outlined above were not deduced in a vacuum but instead have unfolded in the experience of believers throughout history. This chapter will show how silence in its theological and contemplative dimensions finds expression in the experience of the mystics. To deepen the understanding of this topic, I will begin by investigating the phenomena of negative theology, which is a crucial intellectual underpinning of mystical experience. I will then look at mysticism in general and what it reveals about the understanding of silence. From there, I will make a brief foray into the Carmelite tradition and its approach. I will then look more specifically at the foremost proponents of the Carmelite school, santa Teresa de Jesús and san Juan de la Cruz. Their doctrine and experience give insight into the fundamental themes of openness in contemplation and listening availability inherent to silence.

1. Mystical silence

1.1. Negative theology

The phenomenon of silence is generally a core component of mystical experience. Apophatic or *negative* theology provides mystical silence a solid intellectual basis. The complementing of Christian revelation with Greek philosophy in early Christianity led to the development of this system. Reaching its apex in Neo-Platonic thought, the *via negativa* is a method of reflection in which systematic conceptual negation is used to grasp hidden and transcendent aspects of reality.²⁰⁴ «The *via negativa* may be defined as the step-by-step removal of the concrete attributes of a thing, until its essential and transcendent character is revealed»²⁰⁵. Elisabetta Zambruno summarizes negative theology in relation to theology:

«La teología negativa o apofática (del griego apó-fasis, negación) es la que considera que a Dios no pueden convenirle los conceptos o términos del lenguaje humana, y que a Dios se le puede conocer mejor negando de él las categorías del ente finito. Dado que Dios es absolutamente trascendente, ninguna criatura puede conocerlo, ni puede hablar de él de modo adecuado: por eso de Dios se puede decir más lo que no es que lo que es»²⁰⁶.

²⁰⁴ Cf. Mortley, 14.

²⁰⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 18. Yet, this did not remain just an intellectual exercise, it is a radical ascetical quest that implicates ones whole life. Ignacio Verdú explains «La teología apofática supone e implica una negación que va más allá del ámbito de lo meramente teórico, especulativo; se trata de una negación que afecta al ser del hombre en su integridad, que lo desnuda y lo dispone, sin máscaras, sin acomodos, sin hábitos, ni modos, a recibir, en un impredecible encuentro, a quien busca». Cf. Ignacio Verdú. "La noche oscura y la docta ignorancia: Una reflexión acerca de Dionisio Areopagita, el Maestro Eckhart y San Juan de la Cruz". En *Mística y filosofía en el Siglo de Oro*, dirigido por José Luis Fuertes, Manuel Lázaro Pulido, and Idoya Zorroza Huarte, Pamplona: EUNSA, 2017, 64.

²⁰⁶ Elisabetta Zambruno. "Teología negativa". En *Diccionario de la mística*, dirigido por L. Borriello et al., 1657-1666. Madrid: San Pablo, 2002., 1657.

The biblical experience of God's absence, seen especially in the psalms and in the sufferings of Christ, lays a theological foundation for these Greek philosophical intuitions²⁰⁷. The process of negation, though, was modified in the Christian context as the doctrines of the personal nature of God, the Incarnation, and the positive character of divine revelation would not permit a pure negative theology. Church fathers such as Justin Martyr, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine introduced a modified version into later Christian mysticism, while thinkers such as Pseudo-Dionysius would bring it to full maturity²⁰⁸.

In Dionysius²⁰⁹ brief treatise *Theologia Mystica*, we find one of the most significant syntheses of Christian negative theology. The following passage sums up his ideas in the context of counsel, alleging to be directed towards the New Testament figure of Timothy²¹⁰:

«Esto pido, Timoteo, amigo mío, entregado por completo a la contemplación mística. Renuncia a los sentidos, a las operaciones intelectuales, a todo lo sensible y a lo inteligible. Despójate de todas las cosas que son y aun de las que no son. Deja de lado tu entender y esfuérzate por subir lo más que puedas hasta unírte con aquel que está más allá de todo ser y de todo saber. Porque por el libre, absoluto y puro apartamiento de ti mismo y de todas las cosas, arrojándolo todo y del todo, serás elevado espiritualmente hasta el divino Rayo de tinieblas de la divina Supraesencia»²¹¹.

For Dionysius, God is *supra essential*- beyond our concepts. We must enter regions of *unknowing* where the divine mysteries are unveiled in their ultimate simplicity and immutability. Paradoxically, there is a ray of darkness in this knowledge that gives greater light than conceptual knowledge²¹². The image of «el rayo de tinieblas» finds its source in the book of Exodus. In his theophany, Moses experiences the presence of God appearing in a cloud of «thick darkness» (Ex 19, 16-18; 20, 21; Hb 12,18). Gregory of Nyssa will later take up the theme in his *Life of Moses*, where the dark cloud indicates the transcendence of the divine; incomprehensible and beyond all conceptual knowledge²¹³. The darkness signifies the process by which the understanding penetrates God through the *via negativa*. Gregory calls this knowledge a «luminous darkness» that gives one access to God's

²⁰⁷ Cf. Treballe. "El culto del templo", 225.

²⁰⁸ Cf. Zambruno. "Teología negativa", 1657-1662.

²⁰⁹ There is much discussion over the true identity of this mystical author, commonly it is thought that he was a 6th century Syrian monk. He writes under the pseudonym of Dionysius the Areopagite, the biblical personage whom Paul converted to the Christian faith in his preaching to the Areopagus Court in Athens (Hch 17,34). This identification with the Dionysius of the NT gave him a certain authority through the centuries among theologians. It could partly explain how his works continued being studied and taught even in the midst of the various anti-mystical currents in Christian history. Cf. Mortley, 221-242.

²¹⁰ This is an example of the apocryphal aspect of his writings, Cf. Footnote 209.

²¹¹ Pseudo-Dionisio, 371.

²¹² Cf. *Ibid.*, 371.

²¹³ Gregory of Nyssa, Everett Ferguson, and Abraham J. Malherbe. *Gregory of Nyssa : the life of Moses*. New York: Paulist, 1978, 154, Footnote 81.

essence²¹⁴. From this basis, Dionysius forms the metaphor of «el rayo de tinieblas» communicating the divine light while at the same time darkening the intellect due to its transcendent incomprehensibility.

The term will further progress in san Juan de la Cruz, especially in the *Noche oscura*. Here it becomes an explicit metaphor signifying faith. The «rayo de tinieblas» is the light of God received through faith. It is so pure and transcendent that the understanding experiences it as darkness because of its collision with interior impurities and weaknesses²¹⁵. It is true knowledge that does not negate conceptual understanding but transcends it. As a person moves from conceptual meditative activity to mystical contemplation, they are no longer led by the light of reason but by the *dark rays* of faith²¹⁶. Approaching God in this way and receiving the *rayo de tinieblas* is an experience of perfect inner silence. One remains without words or distinct thoughts and is united to the completely ineffable²¹⁷. Through these teachings on the purifying, contemplative, and ineffable quality of silence, Dionysius has had a foundational influence on the understanding of silence in the western mystical tradition²¹⁸.

1.2. Traits of mysticism

The term mysticism is closely tied with early Greek notions of negative theology and the religious thought of early Hellenistic society. It derives from the Greek verb *myo*, which means *closing the mouth and eyes*, relating to something secretive and silent²¹⁹. The term

²¹⁴ Ibid., 94 (II, 164). He explains it thus: «For leaving behind everything that is observed, not only what sense comprehends but also what the intelligence thinks it sees, it keeps on penetrating deeper until by the intelligence's yearning for understanding it gains access to the invisible and the incomprehensible, and there it sees God. This is the true knowledge of what is sought; this is the seeing that consists in not seeing, because that which is sought transcends all knowledge, being separated on all sides by incomprehensibility as by a kind of darkness. Wherefore John the sublime, who penetrated into the luminous darkness, says, 'No one has ever seen God', thus asserting that knowledge of the divine essence is unattainable not only by men but also by every intelligent creature». Cf. Ibid.

²¹⁵ Cf. 2N 5, 3-5.

²¹⁶ Cf. 2S 1-6; 13-15. He will express it in his poem *Noche Oscura*: «ni yo miraba cosa, sin otra luz y guía, sino la que en el corazón ardía».

²¹⁷ Cf. Pseudo-Dionisio, 376.

²¹⁸ Raoul Mortley states the following in terms of his overall influence in the west: «It is difficult to overestimate the importance of pseudo-Dionysius for the history of European culture, particularly for the Latin segment of it. The French in particular look back to the Areopagite for the explanation of much that is in their culture, in respect of theology and philosophy, but also in respect of political institutions. The notion of hierarchy in the Areopagite was to play a role in establishing and ordering the social structure of the Middle Ages [...] There have been few more influential authors in the history of both Eastern and Western Christianity, and it is not really possible to discern where the story ended, or when it will end. The Dionysian tradition has become a cultural undercurrent, emerging at times, but always maintaining the capacity to influence and redirect. The Dionysian corpus, by its own air of mystery, and by its mixture of traditional discipline with speculative imagination, has a magnetism which has proved very durable». Mortley, 221-222.

²¹⁹ Cf. Juan Martín Velasco. *El fenómeno místico: estudio comparado*. Trotta, 1999, 19-20.

refers directly to the cultic initiation ceremonies of the mystery religions. In the subsequent centuries, the word took on new meaning.

Seeking a universal sense of the concept as we understand it today, Juan Martin Velasco explains that *mysticism* indicates an experience of immediate union with the absolute, an exceeding of the ordinary, and deep interiority²²⁰. These characteristics imply the categories of passive receptivity, ineffability, and secret contemplation that are key to an understanding of mystical silence²²¹.

1.3. Mystical silence as receptivity

In terms of passive receptivity to the absolute, silence has been called the divine pedagogy. It is how God secretly instructs the person in truth, demanding a posture of total openness before the exigencies of reality. It means welcoming reality as gift, not seeking to dominate it, but allowing oneself to be shaped by it²²². Silencing our preconceived categories enables an approach from the divine perspective. «Sostenerse en esta anterioridad implica el silencio de toda idea sobre Dios para situarse en un estado de percepción anterior al concepto. Desde la mística no se trata de pensar a Dios, sino desde Dios»²²³.

While mystical silence signifies a kind of passivity, it is not inactive. On the contrary, the pacification of the faculties in which the person renounces their proper undertakings leads to an intense activity of consenting to and welcoming the divine presence²²⁴. The ecstasy of the mystic in this passive stance is paradoxically the most active posture possible²²⁵.

1.4. Ineffability

The intense receptivity to the absolute takes one beyond concepts into a space inaccessible to distinct words or thought, leading to the silence of ineffability. What is seen

²²⁰ Ibid., 23.

²²¹ In terms of passive receptivity, this is explained further in Domenico Sorrentino. "La vita spirituale: dai nomi alla realtà". En *Camminate secondo lo Spirito: atti del II convegno internazionale di mistica cristiana: Assisi, 15-17 settembre 2014*, dirigido por L. Borriello, M.R.D. Genio, and R. Ferrari, Libreria editrice vaticana, 2015, 26.

²²² Cf. García, 157-158.

²²³ Melloni. "La mística silenciosa", 17.

²²⁴ Cf. Anne Ferrari. "Les formes du silence dans le discours mystique, ou quand dire, c'est taire". *Littératures classiques* 39, primavera(2000), https://www.persee.fr/doc/licla_0992-5279_2000_num_39_1_1474., 285.

²²⁵ Cf. Martín Velasco, 327. Yet the active, total attentiveness of contemplation does not necessarily imply a complete absence of interior noise, rather one is able to dwell in the depths of their interiority despite other bothersome noises. Patricio García highlights Teresa de Jesus as an example of this type of implicit mystical silence: «Santa Teresa de Jesús relata que, allá en los arrabales del castillo interior, se oyen los devaneos de la 'loca de la casa', pero que, en modo alguno, se perciben en el hondón del alma donde habita el hombre sosegado y en paz con Dios». Cf. García, 159.

and heard is impossible to express²²⁶. Michael Amaladoss indicates that the core of mystical experience is a direct encounter with the divine that is *superrational*, therefore above ordinary language. «[El místico] tiene una experiencia de Dios que es superracional, intuitiva, emocional, intelectual. Al ser superracional está más allá del lenguaje, es decir, no puede hablarse de ella de un modo racional usando conceptos. En este nivel el místico guarda silencio»²²⁷.

Ineffability is not a fault in language, but rather the divine mystery is unspeakable by nature²²⁸. An experience of the absolute cannot be measured according to the stature of limited human thought that language represents. Language necessarily reduces and restricts the infinite, and there is a general fear of betraying the reality one has encountered²²⁹. Silence then becomes the least inadequate way of preserving the greatness of the mystery²³⁰. It is a choice of the mystic to relinquish yet another human power to give way to God's action. Massimo Baldini calls it an option of «semantic suicide». It prescinds with language to serve the excessive reality encountered, thereby opening new perspectives.

«Il silenzio del mistico è il silenzio di colui che ha compiuto un suicidio semantico per adoperare soltanto le parole del silenzio, è un silenzio che si presenta come l'orizzonte del dire, è un silenzio che ci parla di ciò che non può essere detto. In altre parole, è un silenzio che apre nuove dimensioni alla realtà, che ci rende consapevoli che il dicibile, ciò che può essere detto, non è poi tutto»²³¹.

²²⁶ Cf. Melloni. "La mística silenciosa", 8.

²²⁷ Michael Amaladoss. "Silencio y Dios". *Concilium* 363, November(2015): 62.

²²⁸ Cf. Ferrari. "Les formes du silence", 287. Michalinos Zembylas explains this further: «We cannot comprehend God's very silence not because of a failure of our nature or because of the limits of our cognition, but instead because God in transcending itself is silence in itself [...] Mystical silence is not simply a failure or a refusal to say anything, but it is instead a therapeutic strategy for approaching God. Cf. Michalinos Zembylas. "The Sound of Silence in Pedagogy". *Educational Theory* 54, 2(2004): 197.

²²⁹ Cf. Melloni. "La mística silenciosa", 8.

²³⁰ «"Blasfemare si nombro a Dios", dice Angela Foligno, remarcando la insuficiencia de la palabra para expresar el fervor religioso cuando alcanza su punto más alto». Cf. David Le Breton. *El Silencio*. trad. Agustín Ternes, Madrid: Ediciones sequitur, 2006, 154.

²³¹ Massimo Baldini. *Il linguaggio dei mistici*. Brescia: Editrice Queriniana, 1986, 92. There seems to be a contradiction in that the mystics tend to write and communicate about their experience. Teodoro Polo sheds light on the paradox: «El místico al querer decir lo vivido confiesa que no sabe decirlo. Pero, paradójicamente, lo que es indecible, lejos de cortar la palabra, le faculta al místico para hablar: "quia ineffabilis dedit potestatem fandi" (S. León Magno). Lo que es inefable desarrolla una urgente e irresistible necesidad de hablar. La tentación del místico es el silencio y entre palabra y silencio se moverá todo el discurso místico. El silencio es fuente originaria de la palabra del místico. Silencio que se continúa en la palabra mística, pues ésta contiene en si misma ese Silencio originario». (T. Polo, *La fuerza de un decir*. EDE: Madrid, 1993, 14). Cf. Luis Aguilera Ruiz. "'La música callada'. El silencio como lugar teologal en san Juan de la Cruz". *San Juan de la Cruz* 33, (2004): Footnote 3, 115.

Ultimately in the mystics, love is the main cause of ineffability²³². As divine unmediated love is communicated, words lose relevance because they are no longer adequate, giving way to silent contemplation²³³. Words can only bring two persons to a certain point; their consummation is found in the ecstasy of silent love²³⁴.

1.5. Contemplative silence

Contemplation has been defined in the context of Christian mysticism as «infusión secreta, pacífica y amorosa de Dios»²³⁵. As we saw above, the *infusion*, or inflow of God, demands a passive receptivity, indicating a silencing of the interior powers. A. Devasahayam points out: «La contemplación es un proceso creativo de apropiación le don de Dios a través del profundo silencio interior, después de una adecuada preparación»²³⁶. Thus, silence and contemplation go hand in hand. They mutually reinforce one another, as it is silence which both prepares for contemplation and issues from it²³⁷.

It is only in relation to the divine presence that silence becomes contemplation²³⁸. The consciousness of inhabitation moves one towards mental stillness²³⁹ and welcoming, loving attention²⁴⁰. Juan Martin Velasco describes this process:

«El alma contemplativa percibe en sí misma la presencia de Dios que se le otorga de forma enteramente gratuita; que actúa sin que ella tenga que hacer otra cosa [...] que abrirse, acallar las voces intempestivas del exterior y del interior de sí mismo, prestar atención, escuchar, acoger»²⁴¹.

Thus, contemplation is a theological silence. In the words of Jesús Castellano it is «un silenzio pieno di Dio»²⁴². It is a union of faith, hope, and love so as to wait, listen, and respond to the divine call²⁴³.

²³² We say this of the theistic variety. In the impersonal and non-theistic mysticism characteristic of the East, one speaks of a *metaphysical* union, primarily through knowledge. Cf. Santiago Guerra. "San Juan de la Cruz y el diálogo con Oriente". *Revista de Espiritualidad* 49, (1990): 524.

²³³ Cf. José García de Castro Valdé. "Silent God in a Wordy World. Silence in Ignatian Spirituality". *Theologica Xaveriana* 181, (2016): 196.

²³⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 196.

²³⁵ Cf. San Juan de la Cruz, 1 N 10,6.

²³⁶ A. Devasahayam. *El poder del silencio interior*. trad. José Manuel Lozano-Gotor, Bilbao: Mensajero, 2008, 31.

²³⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 23.

²³⁸ Cf. note 233.

²³⁹ Cf. David Tomlins. "The meaning and value of silence in Christian living". *Cistercian Studies* 17, 2(1982): 179.

²⁴⁰ San Juan de la Cruz's teaching on *atención amorosa* will be treated in chapter five of our study.

²⁴¹ Martín Velasco, 325-326.

²⁴² Jesús Castellano Cervera. "Ascolto e riposta nel silenzio della preghiera". En *Dio Parla Nel Silenzio*, dirigido por B. Moriconi, Roma: Edizioni del Teresianum, 1989, 178.

²⁴³ Cf. *Ibid.*

2. Silence in the Carmelite tradition

The traits of mysticism highlighted above find eminent expression in the Carmelite tradition. They are evident especially in the preoccupation with silent contemplation reflected in Carmel's foundational texts. In the *Book of the institutes of the first monks*,²⁴⁴ we find a clear basis for the order's contemplative identity. At the beginning it states: «*Si quieres ser perfecto y conseguir el fin de la vida monástica y eremítica [...] escóndete en el torrente Carit, guardando silencio en la soledad recóndita*»²⁴⁵. Silence and solitude are presented here as the best means for obtaining the goal of the mystical life. Later, the text states more clearly this objective.

«Esta vida de perfección religiosa encierra dos fines: uno [...] consiste en ofrecer a Dios el corazón santo y limpio de toda actual mancha de pecado [...] El otro fin es un don totalmente gratuito de Dios y que Él comunica al alma. [...] da ya a gustar en el afecto del amor y en el gozo de la luz del entendimiento algo sobrenatural del poder de la presencia de Dios y del deleite de la eterna gloria»²⁴⁶.

The first goal of presenting a pure heart through human effort aided by grace demands an intense ascetical effort. Later writings of the Carmelite mystics will imply that this purity of heart is embodied in the human struggle to pacify the interior faculties²⁴⁷. The second goal is the passive reception of divine love and knowledge from an inhabiting presence, a receptivity which demands a profound interior silence.

The next foundational document where we see the origins of the Carmelite preoccupation with silence is the Rule of St Albert²⁴⁸. The Rule was written to codify an eremitical lifestyle founded on the pillars of solitude, silence, and work²⁴⁹. It follows the trajectory of the desert fathers and early monastic teachers such as John Cassian. Considering the relative brevity of the Rule, the theme of silence takes up a significant

²⁴⁴ I present this work first, before the Carmelite Rule, because it was written as a Carmelite pseudo-history, claiming to predate the foundational Rule by centuries. Therefore, it contains what was seen as the essential spirituality behind the later Rule. It is difficult to overstate the influence this work has had on Carmelite religious formation and spirituality. It is a valuable spiritual resource and a witness to the self-understanding of the charism.

²⁴⁵ Felipe Ribot and Miguel Diego Sánchez. *Libro de la Institución de los primeros monjes*. trad. Valentín de San José, Editorial de Espiritualidad, 2012, 26.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

²⁴⁷ The idea of interior silence as the embodiment of ascetical effort will be developed further in the section in this current chapter on San Juan de la Cruz, and in chapter five.

²⁴⁸ The Carmelite rule was authored by Albert of Jerusalem, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, who redacted the text to preserve and protect the way of life of the group of hermits living on Mount Carmel. He is venerated by the Carmelites as their main legislator.

²⁴⁹ Cf. Mauricio Martín del Blanco. "El silencio en la regla "primitiva" o "primera" de san Alberto, Patriarca de Jerusalem, dada a los Carmelitas, y confirmada por el papa Inocencio I". *Monte Carmelo* 115, 2(2007): 48.

portion; almost one-sixth of the text is dedicated to it, indicating its importance in the Carmelite life. Regarding this ideal, it states:

«Valora el Apóstol el silencio por el hecho de imponerlo en el trabajo (2 Tes 3,12). Y como afirma el Profeta: obra de la justicia es el silencio (Is 32,17). Y en otro lugar: 'vuestra fuerza estriba en callar y confiar' (Is 30,15) [...] Ordenamos que guardéis silencio desde la terminación de completas hasta después del rezo de prima del día siguiente [...] Que cada cual se afane con todos sus cinco sentidos por guardar el silencio, obra de la justicia»²⁵⁰.

We find a kind of spiritual *exegesis* of this section of the Rule through the reflections of later mystical writers in the Carmelite tradition, especially from the Discalced branch. One modern Carmelite mystic, Elizabeth of the Trinity, discovered her fount of spirituality in the Rule's treatment of silence. «Cuando se le preguntó: –“¿Cuál es el punto que preferís de la Regla? Ella respondió sin demora –El silencio»²⁵¹. Another notable mystic of Carmel, Marie-Aimée of Jesús, wrote: «La vida interior podría consistir en esta sola palabra: ¡silencio!»²⁵². She understands silence in the Rule as, above all, an interior silence of the memory, heart, and ego, leading to a silence of total self-surrender²⁵³.

Regarding the Rule's stipulation of silence in work, Ana de San Bartolomé, the beloved secretary of Teresa de Jesús and her proclaimed heir, presents a spiritual interpretation. She sees it as referring to an interior silence, which manifests itself as a stripping of the self-seeking that often coincides with the execution of one's labor²⁵⁴. In regard to the passage in the rule citing the prophet Isaiah «vuestra fuerza estriba en callar y confiar» (Is 30,15), Marie-Eugene Giralou explains that silence and hope here are fomenters of internal strength, where one gathers forces and recollects the dispersed powers of the soul²⁵⁵.

A contemporary Carmelite writer, Silvio Baez, emphasizes how the exterior silence stipulated in the Rule is geared towards listening to the Word of God, engaging in spiritual combat, and persevering in prayer:

«Un silenzio che si manifesta nella solitudine esteriore in cui vivono i frati, ma che fonda le sue radici nel silenzio del cuore, nella contemplazione, nella penitenza e nel combattimento spirituale. Il silenzio è come il terreno fertile in cui si sviluppa l'ideale di vita carmelitana, dato che favorisce l'ascolto quotidiano e perseverante della parola di Dio, invigorisce la solitudine del deserto interiore in cui il carmelitano si riveste dell'armatura di Dio per resistere alle insidie del maligno e crea il clima spirituale necessario per vigilare continuamente in preghiera»²⁵⁶.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 28.

²⁵¹ M. Philipon. *La Doctrina Espiritual de Sor Isabel de La Trinidad* 3^o ed. Buenos Aires: Descleé de Brouwer, 1951, 55.

²⁵² Sor María Amada de Jesús. *Los doce grados del silencio*. Vitoria: Pujol, 1945, 3.

²⁵³ Cf. Ibid., 3-13.

²⁵⁴ Conference 5, Amberes 1621-23, cf. Martín del Blanco. "El silencio en la regla "primitiva"", 46.

²⁵⁵ Cf. Bl. Marie-Eugène de L'Enfant-Jésus, *Je veux voir Dieu.*, 420.

²⁵⁶ Baez. "Silenzio", 797.

Thus, from the foundational texts of the Carmelite school, silence has always been one of the vital identifying factors of its mystical charism. It is seen as essential to the Carmelite life and necessary to fulfill its contemplative goal of union with the divine inhabiting presence.

3. Silence in the founders of the Teresian Carmelite tradition

After giving a general overview of the Carmelite perspective on silence, I will look to two major proponents of this tradition as reference points for this study: santa Teresa de Jesús and san Juan de la Cruz. In these two spiritual masters are found an eminent expression of interior, mystical silence. Their life and teaching give a personal, concrete approach to the topic. Moreover, they shed further light on the aspects of silence treated above, such as receptive openness, profound listening, and the welcoming availability of contemplation.

3.1. Santa Teresa de Jesús²⁵⁷

From the first pages of her *Vida*, we see that santa Teresa de Jesús was disposed towards solitude and silence. She writes about her childhood piety: «Procuraba soledad para rezar mis devociones»²⁵⁸. She will later say in a letter: «Mi inclinación natural es siempre estado de soledad»²⁵⁹.

As a religious, Teresa would have frequently read the Carmelite Rule and the Book of the institution of the first monks. We know from her writings that their contemplative ideals inspired her²⁶⁰. Also, her reading of Francisco de Osuna's *Tercer Abecedario* became an early experience for her of the silence of *recogimiento*. She says about reading Osuna: «Determinéme a seguir aquel camino con todas mis fuerzas»²⁶¹. This motivation led Teresa to make intentional time for silence, practicing quiet prayer for at least two one-hour periods daily²⁶².

²⁵⁷ A detailed summary of silence in Teresa's teaching on the prayer of recollection and the prayer of quiet is found in the doctoral dissertation: Christian Tubau Arjona. *Miguel de Molinos y la vía espiritual de la quietud*. Barcelona: Universidad de Barcelona, 2009, 205-228.

²⁵⁸ V 1,6.

²⁵⁹ Carta 75,2 a Antonio Gaytán, end of 1572.

²⁶⁰ Cf. C 11,4; 5M 1,2.

²⁶¹ V 4,7.

²⁶² Cf. Mark O'Keefe. *In Context: Teresa of Ávila, John of the Cross, and Their World*. Washington D.C.: ICS Publications 2020, 140.

With her mind and heart often torn in different directions, the discipline of silent recollection brought great struggle²⁶³. However, this stage was critical; it became an asceticism that prepared her to eventually rejoice in the divine gift of silence²⁶⁴. Her mystical encounters would later impel Teresa towards the foundation of her reform in San José de Avila. The new convent was meant to be a paradise of divine intimacy where God's presence could *descansar* in the silence of the nuns' interiority²⁶⁵.

In Teresa de Jesús then, silence is primarily a gift which is received, not a human achievement. She writes: «Es ya cosa sobrenatural y que no la podemos procurar nosotros por diligencias que hagamos. Porque es un ponerse el alma en paz, o ponerla el Señor con su presencia»²⁶⁶. God is the main protagonist here which is synonymous with true contemplation. «Entiende que sin ruido de palabras su maestro obra en su alma, y que sus potencias no obran en ella, según le parece. Esto es contemplación perfecta»²⁶⁷.

In her capacity as *maestra* of the spiritual life, Teresa will outline how those who have arrived at this silence should proceed. Their one goal is to simply dwell in the divine inhabiting presence. «Mas que no se canse siempre en andar a buscar esto, sino que se esté allí con Él, acallado el entendimiento»²⁶⁸. In the *Camino de perfección*, Teresa teaches a way of being silent in prayer that she calls *oración de recogimiento*²⁶⁹. It is a kind of method, yet very flexible and personal, for practicing interior silence. It gives the framework necessary to relate to the divine presence and be receptive to the gift of quiet. «Llámase recogimiento, porque recoge el alma todas las potencias y se entra dentro de sí con su Dios, y viene con más brevedad a enseñarla su divino Maestro y a darla oración de quietud, que de ninguna otra manera»²⁷⁰.

Recogimiento was always essential to Teresa's mystical itinerary. Both what human initiative and divine initiative bring about is a kind of silencing of the inner powers²⁷¹. The arduous struggle to be receptive to God's gift will be fully rewarded when one reaches a

²⁶³ V 8,7.

²⁶⁴ Cf. Baldomero Jiménez Duque. "La soledad en Santa Teresa". *Revista de Espiritualidad* 14, (1955): 359. One could say that the experience of her weakness and her powerlessness in maintaining a state of recollection made her appreciate silence all the more and brought into great relief its gratuitous nature.

²⁶⁵ Cf. Bl. Marie-Eugène de L'Enfant-Jésus, *Je veux voir Dieu.*, 417.

²⁶⁶ C 31,2.

²⁶⁷ CE 41,2.

²⁶⁸ V 13,22.

²⁶⁹ She borrows the term from Francisco de Osuna, her first teacher of interior prayer. Osuna describes why he calls this type of prayer *recogimiento* and articulates how it is a true spiritual path in his *Tercer abecedario espiritual*.

²⁷⁰ C 28,4.

²⁷¹ Cf. Ernest Larkin, "St Teresa Of Avila And Centering Prayer," (1984), <http://carmelnet.org/larkin/larkin083.pdf>. 392.

lasting interior silence in the seventh dwelling. Santa Teresa describes it with the image of Solomon's temple, where silence reigns and God alone has his dwelling:

«Pasa con tanta quietud y tan sin ruido todo lo que el Señor aprovecha aquí al alma y la enseña, que me parece es como en la edificación del templo de Salomón, adonde no se había de oír ningún ruido; así en este templo de Dios, en esta morada suya, sólo El y el alma se gozan con grandísimo silencio»²⁷².

Like all the mystics, Teresa often experienced an inability to express adequately what she was receiving. She articulates the *frustration* of ineffability. «Me parecía imposible saber tratar cosa más que hablar en griego, que así es ello dificultoso»²⁷³. In the presence of the divine light, every image falls short of conveying the truth and so one must leave things in silence. «No alcanza la imaginación [...] a pintar ni trazar cómo será esta luz, ni ninguna cosa de las que el Señor me daba a entender con un deleite tan soberano que no se puede decir...y así es mejor no decir más»²⁷⁴.

The concepts of gift, contemplation, and ineffability are crucial to understanding the mystical silence of santa Teresa. They mean a total receptivity to and welcome of the divine transcendent guest. As we saw above, this openness was so important that it led her found new contemplative communities where being present and available to God would be the nuns' *raison d'être*.

3.2. San Juan de la Cruz

The theme of silence is omnipresent in the life and teachings of san Juan de la Cruz. It is a reality he articulates from the initial stages of the spiritual path until the final steps of transformation in divine union²⁷⁵. This section will present certain traits of mystical silence found in san Juan in continuity with the characteristics of passive receptivity, ineffability, and secret contemplation that were highlighted above²⁷⁶.

Throughout his almost fifty years, we find that san Juan is a man enamored with mystery. From this will flow his ministry of teaching²⁷⁷. His love for the mystery of God

²⁷² 7M 3,11.

²⁷³ V 18,8.

²⁷⁴ V 38,2.

²⁷⁵ Cf. Aguilera Ruiz. "La música callada", 113.

²⁷⁶ Cf. Section 1.2. of this chapter. A thorough study which seeks to capture the essence of Juan de la Cruz's teaching on silence as it relates to the spiritual itinerary is found in Luis Aguilera Ruiz. *'La musica callada': Silencio como lugar teologal en san Juan de la Cruz*. Para la licenciatura en teología espiritual, Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 2002. An abundant selection of texts centered on the theme of silence in san Juan has been recently published in: María Sagrario Rollán. *Callar y obrar. Antología del silencio en san Juan de la Cruz*. Burgos: Editorial de espiritualidad, 2021.

²⁷⁷ Cf. Aguilera Ruiz. "La musica callada", 54.

meant that he was to practice a deep interior silence. He did this to keep all his strength for God alone and to serve others from this same love²⁷⁸. His example of recollection facilitated silence in others who encountered him²⁷⁹. As a pedagogue and formator, he insisted especially on interior silence. One witness testified: «El P. Juan enseñaba un silencio integral donde se callan las potencias para estar atentas al habla de Dios. Mas también el retraimiento silencioso era un medio eficaz de madurar el alma»²⁸⁰.

Along with other Christian mystics, silence in san Juan is never an absolute value but is relative to one's relationship with the divine presence. It is the climate in which this presence reveals and communicates itself and in which man responds through a posture of openness, listening, and welcome²⁸¹. «[En Juan de la Cruz] Silencio y esperanza, así unidos, configuran una actitud global del hombre ante Dios, en apertura, en espera, en acogida, en atención teologal»²⁸².

3.2.1. Ascetical dimension

We know that Juan de la Cruz was not in favor of rigorous practices of asceticism which lacked internal consistency. He discerned in them an often-masked egoism which he calls a «penitencia de bestias»²⁸³. In his writings, san Juan seeks to rescue people from spending their energy on practices that are not leading them to their goal. He counsels spiritual persons to take the difficult but fruitful path of silencing their interior powers as the purification necessary to receive the gift of divine contemplation. The whole project of the *Subida-Noche* bears witness to this pastoral goal. One could sum up the essential asceticism in san Juan as *silence*²⁸⁴.

In his practical teaching, Juan de la Cruz stresses external silence in several places²⁸⁵. However, his focus is generally on interior silence, especially that of the appetites. «La mayor necesidad que tenemos es de callar a este gran Dios con el apetito y con la lengua,

²⁷⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 54-55.

²⁷⁹ Even as a young religious, Juan had this effect on others. Witnesses relate: «Era tal su modestia que con sola su presencia “los religiosos sus compañeros corregían y templaban sus demasías”. Si acertaba a pasar por ejemplo donde estuvieran faltando al silencio, se retiraban a sus celdas; y otras veces solían decir: “Vámonos de aquí no venga aquel diablo”». Cf. José Vicente Rodríguez, *San Juan de la Cruz: la biografía* (Madrid: San Pablo, 2016), <https://amz.run/5Hkn>, 104-105.

²⁸⁰ Aguilera Ruiz. "La musica callada", 58, quoting Efrén Montalvá Cléries and Otger Steggink. *Tiempo y vida de San Juan de la Cruz*. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1992, 265.

²⁸¹ Cf. Baldeón-Santiago. "Silencio", 1072.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 1071.

²⁸³ 1 N 6,1-3.

²⁸⁴ 1 S 8,4; 3S 28,6. Cf. Aguilera Ruiz. "La música callada", 119; Baldeón-Santiago. "Silencio", 1072.

²⁸⁵ While exterior silence remains secondary, it never loses its importance in his spiritual itinerary. Cf. Cautelas 18, D 123; 131; 146, Cta. 8. Cf. Aguilera Ruiz. "La música callada", 117-118.

cuyo lenguaje, que él oye, sólo es el callado amor»²⁸⁶. Primarily, this involves a silencing of the senses, especially through detachment from temporal goods. It demands a renouncement of all inordinate voluntary appetites²⁸⁷ and even every thought not ordered to God. «Todo el mundo no es digno de un pensamiento del hombre, porque a sólo Dios se debe; y así, cualquier pensamiento que no se tenga en Dios, se le hurtamos»²⁸⁸. It is a silence that should extend to all the inner faculties not otherwise legitimately occupied. «Las potencias y sentidos no se han de emplear todas en las cosas, sino lo que no se puede excusar, y lo demás dejarlo desocupado para Dios»²⁸⁹.

The insistence on silence is because the inner powers in their natural operations block rather than facilitate contemplation. Supernatural goods are being communicated to them that go beyond their capacity.

«Porque aquí vamos dando doctrina para pasar adelante en contemplación a unión de Dios (para lo cual todos esos medios y ejercicios sensitivos de potencias han de quedar atrás y en silencio, para que Dios de suyo obre en el alma la divina unión) conviene ir por este estilo desembarazando y vaciando y haciendo negar a las potencias su jurisdicción natural y operaciones, para que se dé lugar a que sean infundidas e ilustradas de lo sobrenatural, pues su capacidad no puede llegar a negocio tan alto, antes estorban, si no se pierde de vista»²⁹⁰.

The concept of *noche* in san Juan signifies this silence of the inner faculties. For the *noche* puts to silence the inordinate inner powers²⁹¹, so that God's self-communication can be received. When the potencies are awake and active, all they serve is to block and disrupt what God is working in the person²⁹². This interior silence demands that nothing enters which can divert one's heart away from the divine presence. One of san Juan's favorite expressions of this practice is found in Psalm 58 «*Mi fortaleza guardaré para ti: esto es, de toda la habilidad y apetitos y fuerzas de mis potencias, no queriendo emplear su operación ni gusto fuera de ti en otra cosa*»²⁹³.

3.2.2. Listening and openness

Silence as asceticism in San Juan has one goal: to open the person radically to God's secret communication²⁹⁴. This openness implies an attentive listening stance which

²⁸⁶ Cta. 8; 1 S 8,4.

²⁸⁷ Cf. Cautelas 7, 1S 11,2.

²⁸⁸ D 35; 79; 115, Cf. Aguilera Ruiz. "La música callada", 127-136.

²⁸⁹ D 116.

²⁹⁰ 3 S 2,2.

²⁹¹ He describes it poetically as *Estado ya mi casa sosegada*. Cf. *P Noche oscura*, strophe 1.

²⁹² CB 16, 10-11.

²⁹³ 2 N 11,3.

²⁹⁴ Cf. Baldeón-Santiago. "Silencio", 1072.

facilitates hearing the divine voice. «Aprender a poner las potencias en silencio y callando para que hable Dios»²⁹⁵. Thus, silence is what makes possible the reception of God's word. «Una palabra habló el Padre, que fue su Hijo, y ésta habla siempre en eterno silencio, y en silencio ha de ser oída del alma»²⁹⁶. For this reason san Juan indicates that closing the interior to all things outside of God, calming and quieting the faculties, will also bring about the ideal listening stance: «pero aquí a todas cosas de donde eso puede venir la cerramos, haciendo a la memoria que quede callada y muda, y sólo el oído del espíritu en silencio a Dios, diciendo con el profeta (1 Sm. 3,10): Habla, Señor, que tu siervo oye»²⁹⁷.

However, the key to listening in san Juan is not the absence of all interior thoughts or activities. Human experience teaches that this is generally not possible. Instead, one must practice detachment of the *will* from distinct interior movements and cease supporting oneself on these. It is the *desire* to remain with the purely natural use of the faculties that obstruct the hearing of God's delicate voice.

«Que cualquiera cosa de pensamiento o discurso o gusto a que entonces el alma se quiere arrimar, la impediría, inquietaría y haría ruido en el profundo silencio que conviene que haya en el alma, según el sentido y el espíritu, para tan profunda y delicada audición, que habla Dios al corazón en esta soledad»²⁹⁸.

According to Juan de la Cruz, God is the one who is working in this endeavor, and he has one goal: that the human heart can receive his word. «Le ha costado mucho a Dios llegar a estas almas hasta aquí, y precia mucho haberlas llegado a esta soledad y vacío de sus potencias y operaciones, para poderles hablar al corazón, que es lo que él siempre desea»²⁹⁹.

3.2.3. Ineffability

As we saw above, ineffability is the expression of human silence in front of the divine mystery, beyond every concept and mental category. As the person becomes progressively attuned to the divine communication, the mystery revealed overwhelms their natural capacities, so words fail to capture it. «Lo que Dios comunica al alma en esta estrecha junta, totalmente es indecible y no se puede decir nada, así como del mismo Dios no se puede decir algo que sea como él»³⁰⁰. Thus, san Juan feels great hesitance in attempting to explain something essentially indescribable. He wants to avoid, above all, that the written word

²⁹⁵ 3S 3,4.

²⁹⁶ D 99.

²⁹⁷ 3S 4,5.

²⁹⁸ LIB 3,34.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 3,54.

³⁰⁰ CB 26,4.

becomes identified with the mystical experience³⁰¹. He references these sentiments saying: «De aquí tienen en decirlo grande repugnancia ... porque ésta es indecible»³⁰².

While in some ways this renders the enterprise of an adequate expression impossible, for san Juan and other mystics, poetry is the *least* inadequate means of communicating the secrets of the divine mystery. It is the literary form closest to silence³⁰³. With its wordplay and symbolism, it can transcend in some way the normal limits of prose. Jorge Guillen comments on this: «Así, con “figuras, comparaciones y semejanzas” se sugiere algo de los “secretos y misterios”. La poesía habrá de resolverse, pues, en el lenguaje figurado: comparación, metáfora, símbolo. El lenguaje rebasa entonces sus límites intelectuales»³⁰⁴.

Perhaps the *Cantico espiritual* is the most remarkable example of san Juan's figurative language expressing something fundamentally beyond words. The images of *la música callada*, *la soledad sonora*³⁰⁵ express ineffable silence by their paradoxical nature and have the effect of causing silence in the reader³⁰⁶. San Juan also expresses the ineffable mystery in el Cantico as a *un no sé qué que quedan balbuciendo*³⁰⁷. The symbol of a stammering child best describes the experience of a reality beyond knowledge and expression.

We can see the presence of silence in the *Romances*, where the being of God is so beyond human words that Juan calls it *un inefable nudo*³⁰⁸. In the poem *Entréme donde no supe*, he is more explicit about the ineffability of what he has received. Echoing Cantico 7 he states: *que me quedé balbuciendo, toda ciencia trascendiendo*³⁰⁹. He has entered the *tenebrosa nube* that cannot be comprehended, or even less, explained³¹⁰.

³⁰¹ CB Prologue. Cf. Federico Ruiz Salvador. "Introducción general ". En *Obras completas*, dirigido por José Vicente Rodríguez and Federico Ruiz Salvador, Fonte: Burgos, 2019, 29.

³⁰² 2N 17,5. In footnote 231 of this chapter, a general hypothesis was given of why mystics speak and write of their experience, in spite of the futility of the endeavor. In response to the logical question of why san Juan himself did not keep silence, Michalinos Zembylas explains: «St. John of the Cross did not keep silent because his vocation as a teacher of contemplation required him to speak. While silence might be the most appropriate response under some conditions, it would be ineffective under other conditions». Cf. Zembylas. "Sound of Silence", 198.

³⁰³ Cf. Aguilera Ruiz. "“La música callada”", 115.

³⁰⁴ Jorge Guillen. "Lenguaje insuficiente San Juan de la Cruz o lo inefable místico". En *Lenguaje y poesía*, dirigido por Jorge Guillen, Madrid: Alianza, 1983, 85.

³⁰⁵ CB 13.

³⁰⁶ Cf. Egido. "El silencio místico", 207-208.

³⁰⁷ CB 7.

³⁰⁸ P *Romances* 35.

³⁰⁹ P *Entréme donde no supe* 2.

³¹⁰ Cf. Ex 19,16; Hb 12,18. We saw earlier in the chapter an explanation of this term developed from the Scriptural testimony and the works of Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Dionysius. Cf. *Entréme donde no supe*, 5.

In concluding this section, it is vital to indicate that, unlike certain expressions of eastern mysticism, for san Juan ineffability is never solely an experience of knowledge. Instead, what is inexpressible is the love communicated³¹¹. «Primeramente llama secreta a esta contemplación tenebrosa... que se comunica e infunde en el alma por amor»³¹². In the *Cantico* he will specify this: «Las alabanzas y requiebros de divino amor que con gran frecuencia pasan entre los dos son inefables»³¹³.

It is fitting then that Juan de la Cruz concludes his major works with an acute consciousness of his poverty of expression. It removes from him any remaining desire to continue writing: «En aquel aspirar a Dios, yo no querría hablar, ni aún quiero; porque veo claro que no lo tengo de saber decir y parecería menos si lo dijese [...]. Y por eso, aquí lo dejo»³¹⁴.

3.2.4. Transition to contemplation

At a certain point in the spiritual life, the mystical doctor teaches, God makes the initiative to bring one into a more receptive state of welcoming his communication. Thus begins a process of simplifying and quieting the interior discursive powers so that in stillness, one can receive an inflow of divine love. San Juan defines contemplation thus: «Contemplación no es otra cosa que infusión secreta, pacífica y amorosa de Dios, que, si la dan lugar, inflama al alma en espíritu de amor»³¹⁵. It is a *divine infusion* of love given and received secretly and quietly. Later he will define it in terms of its various characteristics: «La contemplación es oscura, [...] secreta o escondida, en la cual, sin ruido de palabras [...] como en silencio y quietud, a oscuras de todo lo sensitivo y natural, enseña Dios ocultísima y secretísimamente al alma sin ella saber cómo»³¹⁶.

Contemplation demands inner silence because of the pure incapacity of natural powers to capture the divine inflow, which is infinite and transcendent.

«Todas las cuales imaginaciones se han de venir a vaciar del alma, quedándose a oscuras según este sentido, para llegar a la divina unión, por cuanto no pueden tener alguna proporción de próximo medio con Dios tampoco, como las corporales que sirven de objeto a los cinco sentidos exteriores»³¹⁷.

³¹¹CB Prologue; 33,7. Cf. Guillen. "Lenguaje insuficiente San Juan de la Cruz o lo inefable místico", 85.

³¹²2N 17,2.

³¹³CB 34,1.

³¹⁴LIA 4,17. Cf. Ruiz Salvador. "Introducción general", 29.

³¹⁵1N 10,6.

³¹⁶CB 39,12.

³¹⁷2S 12,3.

As a person begins to respond to the divine invitation by striving to still their faculties, discursive prayer gives way to contemplation. One desires only this silence, even when experiencing sensible dryness: «la cual contemplación, que es oculta y secreta para el mismo que la tiene, ordinariamente, junto con la sequedad y vacío que hace al sentido, da al alma inclinación y gana de estarse a solas y en quietud, sin poder pensar en cosa particular ni tener gana de pensarla»³¹⁸.

3.2.5. Conclusion to silence in San Juan de la Cruz

This section shows that silence is very present in the spiritual experience and itinerary of the mystical doctor. From poetic ineffability to the ascetic and contemplative path, silence takes a lead role and is synonymous with the gift of God's self-communication, leading to Trinitarian union. It means a listening stance that becomes total openness to the divine presence. It is a disposition to keep all one's interior forces for God alone. In conclusion, Jesús Castellano helps summarize the itinerary of san Juan:

«Juan de la Cruz hace del silencio una ascesis del saber callar externa e interiormente, una pedagogía del progreso en la contemplación, que silencia la imaginación y las palabras sucesivas para educarlo a la palabra sustancial del decirse totalmente a Dios que se dice también en totalidad a nosotros en el silencio lleno de la Palabra, el Hijo, y sobre todo del soplo del Espíritu, referente personal de todo ese silencio en el que él obra, es quietud y santificación y reposo. De esta forma se abre el cristiano a un silencio de escucha en hondura, y a la vez se reviste del silencio como de un vestido nupcial»³¹⁹.

4. Recapitulation

In this chapter, I have explored silence from the lens of mysticism, beginning with the intellectual current of negative theology and Pseudo-Dionysius. I then moved into traits of mysticism in general, seeing how the fundamental themes of passive receptivity, ineffability, and contemplation imply a deep interior silence. The Carmelite school of spirituality exemplifies these aspects of, which I showed by a brief foray into the foundational documents of this tradition.

The two great Carmelite mystics, santa Teresa de Jesús and san Juan de la Cruz, teach a more practical and synthetic understanding of mystical silence. They share common themes of listening and contemplation. They teach an ineffability of silence that draws one to a more passive, receptive stance. Santa Teresa has a deep sense of silence as divine gift, difficult to explain, manifesting itself as contemplative prayer. In comparison, san Juan has a more

³¹⁸ 1N 9,6.

³¹⁹ Castellano Cervera. "Aportaciones ", 101.

pedagogical approach to silence in an ascetical key of interior purification. This asceticism of silence is necessary to prepare one to receive the divine communication which infinitely exceeds a person's natural capacities. Thus, the silence of Saints Teresa and Juan is never an end in itself; instead, it is ordered to listening, openness, and availability to the inhabiting divine presence. These observations will be brought into fuller relief through considering the silence of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in the next chapter. She is regarded as the prototype of all mystical life, embodying the attitudes highlighted in this study.

IV. Mary as witness and paradigm of silence

Silence for the sake of presence encounters its paradigm in the person of Mary, the mother of the Lord. This chapter will investigate her silence, especially from her role as perfect disciple and fount of the mystical life. First, I will examine the testimony of Scripture in general, which gives a window into Mary's inner life, especially in relation to the mysteries of her son. Here is found a *kenotic* silence in imitation of Christ, becoming emptied of self so as to correspond fully to the divine plan. Next, the specific Lucan scriptural texts will be investigated, which give a window into Mary's theological reflection and interior silence. They reveal a contemplative woman who engaged her natural faculties in complete service to God's designs. These texts present Mary as an image of wisdom who contemplates reality from her heart, embodying a mystical attitude that can rest in divine truth, even when God's word is not fully understood.

I will investigate Mary's silence from a pneumatological perspective, exploring the connection between Mary and the Holy Spirit and how she can be seen as a transparency of the third divine person. This connection sheds light on how Mary is the embodiment of mystical silence. I will then look at the characteristics of listening and receptivity in Mary that are essentially linked to her contemplative and mystical stance. Next, I will explore a feminist critique of traditional Marian silence and how her silence can be vindicated by feminist thought. Finally, I will clarify Joseph's relationship with Marian silence.

1. General overview of Mary's silence in Scripture

In confronting the vast tradition of Marian thinking and theology in the Church, it is often noted that Mary spoke very few words in proportion to the importance accorded her. This critique is understandable if silence is equated with marginalization. However, if her silence is seen in a theological light as listening, openness, and an emptying of self in union with Jesus, then the difficulties due to her lack of discourse fade away.

Mary of Nazareth is seen in Scripture to be the representative of the Old Testament *anawím*, and *Daughter Zion*³²⁰. She is the one who in silent hope awaits the coming Messiah. «Desde este silencio abierto a la espera, María se presenta como el "tipo" de aquella porción

³²⁰ Identifying Mary with this Old Testament title signified a marked development in Mariology from the time immediately preceding the Second Vatican Council and afterwards. For a helpful exposition of this idea, Cf. Joseph Ratzinger. *Daughter Zion: Meditations on the Church's Marian Belief*. trad. J.M. McDermott, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983, 1-82.

del Israel de ayer, que se prepara para acoger la salvación de un Dios que escoge lo que no cuenta a los ojos de los hombres»³²¹.

In the moment of the Annunciation, the silent hope of Israel reaches its plenitude. Mary's humble and discreet bearing is consistent with the divine plan to come into the world almost unperceived, far from human fame³²². Mary receives the word from the angel in a welcoming openness. She allows it to resound interiorly, provoking her questioning and breaking any preconceived plans for the future. Then, from her deep reflective stance, she speaks her *fiat*, echoing the one spoken Word that proceeds from the eternal silence of the Father (Jn 1,1). Thus, through Mary's silence, God came into the world. «The power of the Holy Spirit came over the Virgin praying alone in the hidden, silent room in Nazareth and brought about the Incarnation of the Savior»³²³.

The birth of the Messiah occurs in obscurity, and we do not hear any words from Mary. However, we do hear the boisterous tidings of the shepherds who have received the message of the angels. It is said that all were wondering and marveling at the report of the shepherd's visions (Lc 2,18). Yet Mary does not *wonder* and share the reactions of those around her. Instead, she keeps her experience to herself, taking a silent contemplative stance in contrast to these other responses (Lc 2,19)³²⁴.

In Nazareth, we have further testimony of the silence of Mary in connection to the overall silence of the Son, interrupted solely by the episode of finding the child Jesus in the Temple (Lc 2, 41-52). After Jesus responds to his mother's pain-filled question, she returns to her habitual attitude of reflective quiet (2,51). In returning to Nazareth, there will be almost twenty years of obscure silence³²⁵.

In the public life of Jesus, Mary's silent hiddenness comes into relief. She is not present in Christ's itinerant journeys, and in the few places where we see her, there is a mysterious and enigmatic quality to her role. In Cana, her words are concise and express the openness

³²¹ Aniano Álvarez-Suarez. *Con María la Madre de Jesús: Retos evangélico-eclesiales de la espiritualidad mariana*. Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2002, 39.

³²² Cf. *Ibid.*

³²³ St. Edith Stein. *The hidden life : hagiographic essays, meditations, spiritual texts*. trad. Waltraut Stein, 2014, 12.

³²⁴ Cf. Julie Kelso. "But Mary was preserving these matters, carefully bringing together and considering them in her heart": Ethical Listening, Contemplation, and the Cultivation of a Sexuating Silence". *The Bible and Critical Theory* 10, (2014): 51.

³²⁵ Pope St. Paul VI comments on the fruitfulness of the home in Nazareth: «Silencio de Nazaret, enséñanos el recogimiento, la interioridad, la aptitud de prestar oídos a las buenas inspiraciones y palabras de los verdaderos maestros; enséñanos la necesidad y el valor de la preparación, del estudio, de la meditación, de la vida personal e interior, de la oración que Dios sólo ve secretamente» Pope St. Paul VI, *Alocución en Nazaret, 5 enero 1964*, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/es/speeches/1964/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19640105_nazareth.html.

and availability characteristic of her. The saying «They have no wine» (Jn 2,3) demonstrates a type of *indirect demand*, «se limita a informarlo, sin formular una petición explícita»³²⁶. In this, we glimpse Mary again as the personification of expectant Israel, who waits in silent hope for the fulfillment of the promise that only the Messiah can bring³²⁷. The saying «Do whatever he tells you» (Jn 2,5) embodies her kenotic, contemplative attitude. She does not refer to herself, but she speaks and acts in pure reference to Christ.

The episode at Cana reveals that Mary does not seek to impose her own categories. Instead, her words indicate a spirit of listening and docility which she desires also for others³²⁸. In general, her silence during Christ's life is so that others can discover the identity of her son. It is an attitude that facilitates a reception of the divine word. «Silencio destinado a desembocar en la comprensión del secreto de Jesús, como Hijo del Padre, como Mesías y Señor en cuya Palabra se encuentra la voz misma de Dios»³²⁹.

The next place highlighted is the Crucifixion of Jesus (Jn 19,25). Here it is an agonizing silence. Mary is in solidarity with the millions of women who have experienced powerlessness in the face of crushing loss³³⁰. Nevertheless, we have in this scene a strong contemplative serenity.³³¹ We also find in Mary's stance an interior dispossession. It is a total stripping, a letting-go of everything she based her life upon³³². The *kenotic* silence of

³²⁶ Juan Mateos and Juan Barreto. *El Evangelio de Juan : analisis linguistico y comentario exegetico*. Madrid: Ed. Cristiandad, 1979, 148.

³²⁷ Mateos and Barreto state this connection more explicitly: «En la narración, construida sobre el símbolo boda/alianza, la madre, que pertenece a la antigua alianza, pero que reconoce al Mesías y espera en él, personifica a los israelitas que han conservado la fidelidad a Dios y la esperanza en sus promesas [...] Expone a Jesús lo intolerable de la situación, esperando que él ponga remedio. No puede saber lo que Jesús hará, pero sabe muy bien lo que a Israel le falta. El antiguo Israel pone su confianza en el Mesías, al que ha reconocido (1,45;49). No se dirige al jefe del banquete, encargado de procurar las provisiones y responsable de la carencia de vino; pertenece a la situación, y de él no hay nada que esperar. Sólo el Mesías puede dar la solución». Cf. *Ibid.*, 149.

³²⁸ About this contemplative quality of docility, Mateos and Barreto will say that «La madre del Mesías les dice [a los sirvientes] que se pongan a la completa disposición de éste». Cf. *Ibid.*, 150.

³²⁹ Álvarez-Suarez, 43.

³³⁰ A testimony to this silence of solidarity is given by Virgilio Elizondo: «Mary remained silent at the foot of the Cross. Conscious of the collective experience of other women who had passed through similar trials, she knew that she was powerless. In the person of the "Madre dolorosa," we see millions of poor people, especially those in Latin America. They see their loved ones condemned by the unjust world of the powerful, and the only thing they can do is accept their suffering in silence. Mary teaches the power of a supportive presence when no concrete action is possible. Mary wanted to protest strongly against the condemnation of her Son; she remained silent». Cf. Bertrand de Margerie. "Mary in Latin American Liberation Theologies". *Marian Studies* 38, (1987): quoting from: Virgilio Elizondo. *Virgen Y Madre: Reflexiones biblicas sobre María de Nazaret*. San Antonio: Mexican American Cultural Center, 1983, 95-97.

³³¹ Unlike certain artistic renditions, the thesis that Mary suffered hysterical grief or lost her senses in this moment has never predominated in the Catholic tradition. In fact, Teresa de Jesús was very much against this portrayal, and even expressed her repugnance for an optional votive mass in the liturgy commemorating Mary's *swooning*. Teresa was eventually vindicated as the liturgical act was dropped in the Church and never would return. Cf. Miguel Ángel Boyero. *La Virgen Maria en la espiritualidad de santa Teresa de Jesús*. Roma: Pontificia Institutum Teresianum, 1977, 174-177.

³³² Cf. José Ramón García-Murga. "Virgen feliz a la escucha de Dios". *Marian Studies* 17, (2014): 117.

Christ finds its fullest echo in his mother's heart. Anne Carpenter summarizes the silence of Mary at the foot of the Cross:

«The depths of Mary's consent, stripped of everything but its harrowing vulnerability, requires every inch of her capacity to give...forsaken of every possible comfort, she utters her agreement in silent faith. This is her kenosis, her obedient self-emptying in the face of her crucified Son»³³³.

However, like her son, Mary's kenosis is based on trusting fidelity. It is a silence that welcomes the plan of God and remains available to others. It is a silence full of hope. This will lead to Holy Saturday, where Mary silently keeps vigil, awaiting the fulfillment of Christ's promise³³⁴. Scripture is mute about Mary at the Resurrection³³⁵. Still, later at Pentecost, she will be the embodiment of the Church in contemplative prayer, with total openness to the gift of the Spirit (Hch 1,14). «Congregated around the silently praying Virgin, the emergent church awaited the promised new outpouring of the Spirit that was to quicken it into inner clarity and fruitful outer effectiveness»³³⁶.

2. Mary treasured all these things in her heart

After giving a general image of the silence of Mary in the gospel accounts, we will now focus on the two brief passages from the gospel of Luke, which are the most explicit windows into Mary's interiority. First, after the shepherds proclaimed what they had heard from the angels, the text states: «All who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart» (Lc 2,18-19). Later, after the child Jesus is found with the elders in the temple and gives his mysterious reply, Luke says: «And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart» (Lc 2,51).

2.1. Analysis of the text

In 2,19 the Greek word for *kept* is συντηρέω (synetērei), signifying keeping with care or conserving³³⁷. Synetērei describes a highly positive activity of conservation. It is a memory of lively faith³³⁸. Luke presents Mary as the model believer, and as such, she must not only

³³³ Anne M. Carpenter. "Kenosis at the Foot of the Cross: Phil. 2:5 as the Hermeneutic Key to Hans Urs von Balthasar's Mariology". *Marian Studies* 61, (2010): 44.

³³⁴ Cf. Bernard Sesboïe. "Quand Dieu se tait. Silence de Dieu, silence de l'homme". *Christus* 49, (2002): 159.

³³⁵ While it is not in Scripture, there is a strong tradition that, after the Resurrection, Christ appeared first to his mother. We see this especially in the mystical experience of santa Teresa de Jesús. Cf. Rel 15,6.

³³⁶ St. Edith Stein, 12.

³³⁷ Cf. Francois Bovon. *El evangelio según San Lucas, Vol I: Lc. 1-9*. Salamanca: Sígueme, 1995, 190-91.

³³⁸ Cf. Ibid.

guard the events in her memory but give an authentic interpretation of the mysteries³³⁹. Thus, he states that Mary *ponders* συμβάλλουσα (*symballousa*), meaning piecing together, evaluating, interpreting³⁴⁰. Nevertheless, it is not a discursive exercise that she is undertaking, rather an interpretation of the heart. As François Bovon explains: «Symballousa no indica una simple evaluación lógica e intelectual de los hechos. María no interpreta con su entendimiento, sino con su voluntad y afectividad: en su corazón»³⁴¹.

The episode in 2,51 focuses on Mary, the mother, «silent and set apart»³⁴². The word for what Mary *keeps* in her heart is distinct from 2,19. In 2,51, it is διέτηρέι [*dietērei*], which is often interpreted as «treasured» and stresses more the conservational aspect³⁴³. Nevertheless, as Meyer points out, this is not a sentimental attachment to her memories; instead, what Mary guards and treasures are the conjunction of all the mysteries of salvation found in the infancy accounts. However, she does not interpret them at this point since they are beyond comprehension³⁴⁴. Here the silence of ineffability is present as the text «underscores the coming of messianic salvation as a divine work surpassing human understanding»³⁴⁵.

2.2. Sapiential meaning

Luke 2,19; 51 gives a unique perspective of Mary. The gospel presents her as a sign of wisdom, showing in her person what it means to be open to God's word and interiorize it. Lawrence Choate explains:

«In her silence, she appears as the woman of wisdom who, in light of the Paschal event, remembers and keeps before her, interprets and compares, the words and facts of the birth and infancy of her son, questions herself about the meaning of obscure phrases overshadowed by the cross (see Luke 2:34-35 and 48-50) and accepts the silences of God with her own adoring silence»³⁴⁶.

Commentaries on this passage often stress that the word *symballousa* has a sapiential meaning. It signifies a harmonizing of events that seem contradictory, bringing clarity and

³³⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 190-191.

³⁴⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 191.

³⁴² Ben F. Meyer. "But Mary kept all these things . . . (Lk 2, 19.51)". *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 26, 1(1964): 47.

³⁴³ Cf. Bovon, footnote 54, 234.

³⁴⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*

³⁴⁵ Meyer. "Mary kept all these things", 49.

³⁴⁶ Lawrence M. Choate. "Mary in the Lent and Easter Seasons: Liturgical References". *Marian Studies* 42, (1991): 53.

resolution³⁴⁷. This action echoes the attribute of wisdom which brings about order and harmony « [Wisdom] reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and she orders all things well» (Sab 8:1). In Luke's gospel, Mary receives the revelatory events and engages her heart to bring them into unity. The words chosen reveal that she was not exercising her thoughts out of curiosity or speculation. Instead, Mary allowed these things to enter into her silence³⁴⁸. She harmonized them and peacefully drew out wisdom through a mind in tune with the divine will.

2.3. A heart of silence

In Lc 2:51 Mary receives the adolescent Jesus' words in her heart, exemplifying an attitude of openness and a fecund silence. «Mary does not understand what Jesus is saying, but she keeps it in her heart and allows it gradually to come to maturity there»³⁴⁹. Rather than stress a discursive mental approach, Luke uses the word *heart* as the locus of Mary's keeping and guarding.

«The consideration of difficult matters not yet understood, or even understandable, does not take place in a purely rational manner, in the nous, which is the locale of the faculties of perception and understanding, of rational thought (e.g. Lk 24:45). While *kardia* [heart] also is a site of understanding, it is rather the more holistic site of a person's physical, spiritual, and mental life; the center of purpose and will, emotion and thought»³⁵⁰.

Mary's activity reflects a truly contemplative stance. She took in the words, pieced them together in a spirit of faith, and found the harmony and unity that only interior silence can produce. The harmony of faith Mary achieves brings about a kind of rest, making her a paradigm of contemplation³⁵¹.

³⁴⁷ Cf. Jesús Castellano Cervera. "La espiritualidad Mariana". En *In communion with Mary: Our heritage and prospects for the future*, dirigido por Edmondo Coccia, Roma: Edizioni Carmelitane, 2003, 91. Mary's experience here seems consistent with the thought of Max Picard who explains how interior silence brings together contradictions and harmonizes an abundance of overwhelming stimuli, seemingly disparate:

«To save man from the invasion and congestion of the too-many objects that are beyond his powers of assimilation, he must be brought into relationship again with the world of silence, in which the many objects find their true order automatically, in this world of silence where they spread themselves out into a balanced unity». Cf. Picard, 57.

³⁴⁸ Cf. Garcia-Murga. "Virgen feliz", 117.

³⁴⁹ Joseph Ratzinger. *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*. New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2012, 125.

³⁵⁰ Kelso. "Mary was preserving these matters", 65.

³⁵¹ Theodore Koehler analyzes the preaching of the 12th century abbot Rupert of Deutz on the contemplative rest present in Mary's pondering heart. «In the silence of the Blessed Virgin, Rupert sees the grace of the mystical rest in God, according to the interpretation of Canticles 5:1, Ego dormio el cor meum vigilat. Mary holds the primacy, a role of magisterium in this contemplation: "Indeed many daughters, many souls, have rested in the same fashion ... but you obtained the whole mastership in this rest and you hold the whole first place in this vigil of the heart"». Théodore Koehler. "The Heart of Mary in the Latin Tradition: From the Seventh to the Sixteenth Century". *Marian Studies* 25, (1996): 109.

Thus, Mary's silence is both contemplative and discursive. However, her discursiveness is never an anxious attempt to impose her own categories and make things fit into her understanding, as often happens in one's use of this faculty. Rather, through faith, Mary reflects in order to discover how she can better integrate the mystery³⁵². Pope Benedict XVI summarizes it: «Mary remains even-tempered, she does not get agitated, she is not overcome by events greater than herself; in silence she considers what happens, keeping it in her mind and heart, and pondering it calmly and serenely»³⁵³.

3. Mary and the Holy Spirit

Sally Jo Shelton proposes reading these passages with a “Spirit hermeneutic”, meaning that Mary's interiority in Luke can be understood as a continuing reliance on the Holy Spirit and not on her own natural powers³⁵⁴. Shelton believes that the Spirit was working in Mary's *pondering*, breaking the molds and preconceptions Israel had for its Messiah. Through the Holy Spirit's guidance, Mary's experience was illuminated by the Scriptures, Jewish tradition, and reason³⁵⁵. Therefore, it is fitting to use this same «hermeneutic of the Spirit» to understand Mary's silence overall.

As we have seen in chapter one, God is the origin of all silence, and the Holy Spirit can be seen as the personal expression of the divine silence³⁵⁶. San Juan de la Cruz states «Una palabra habló el Padre, que fue su Hijo, y ésta habla siempre en eterno silencio, y en silencio ha de ser oída del alma»³⁵⁷. The silence that San Juan refers to is not an abstract space or a mere absence of sound, necessary for hearing; it is a personal reality that is expressed in the Holy Spirit³⁵⁸. Thus, we can probe more deeply into the silence of Mary through her relation to the Holy Spirit.

Mary has traditionally been referred to as the “spouse of the Holy Spirit”. However, Rene Laurentin points out that this is not the correct terminology. She did not have an objective “face to face” relationship with the Holy Spirit, nor does anyone³⁵⁹. He explains that the

³⁵² San Juan de la Cruz describes this kind of discursive remembering as a way to enkindle love and knowledge of God. It is not in any way harmful to contemplation, but rather facilitates it. Cf 3S 14,2.

³⁵³ Pope Benedict XVI, "Homily for Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God 1 enero 2013," https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2013/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20130101_world-day-peace.html.

³⁵⁴ Cf. Sally Jo Shelton. "Jesus' Mother “Treasured All These Words . . . in Her Heart” (Luke 2:19): On Using a Spirit Hermeneutic to Reflect Together About Mary”. *Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology* 2, 1/2(2017): 63.

³⁵⁵ Cf. Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Cf. Section 2.2.

³⁵⁷ D 99 (*Puntos de amor*, 21).

³⁵⁸ Cf. Kowalczyk. "Lo Spirito Santo, presenza silenziosa nella Trinità e in noi", 75.

³⁵⁹ As seen in chapter one, the Spirit's personhood is experienced distinctly from that of the Father and the Son, marked by a silent and elusive presence. Cf. Ibid., 72-73.

Spirit acts from within as a motivating principle. His nature is elusive and self-effacing, not speaking of himself (Jn 16:13)³⁶⁰. Mary was totally united to the Spirit but in a manner different from a spousal union. Rather, the Spirit was entirely at work in Mary's *interior*, actualizing all her potentialities and becoming the sole motivating force of her actions. «Estando desde el principio levantada a este alto estado... siempre su moción fue por el Espíritu Santo» as Juan de la Cruz explains of her³⁶¹.

This unique, interior relationship between Mary and the Spirit means that rather than the term *spouse*, Mary is better described as *transparency* of the Spirit:

«The term seems strange because while the Holy Spirit is invisible, Mary is a visible creature. But a transparency is, precisely, a print or a picture illuminated from behind (within); and Mary is, precisely, the most perfect visible image or expression of the Holy Spirit in this world, illuminated as she is by the Spirit from within»³⁶².

San Juan de la Cruz will echo this thought in his description of the term *overshadowing* [obumbración] of Mary by the Holy Spirit (Lc 1,35)³⁶³. He explains that through this overshadowing, a person receives a unique participation in the divine attributes, «el mismo

³⁶⁰ Cf. Rene Laurentin. *The Meaning of Consecration Today: A Marian Model for a Secularized Age*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992, 150-151.

³⁶¹ 3S 2,10. Ismael Bengoechea further explains san Juan's thought «Este es el principio que establece el Santo para entender e interpretar todo lo que fue la Virgen Maria y todo lo que aconteció en y por Maria: 1) Ella estaba elevada desde el principio al alto estado de unión con Dios; 2) Ella desde el principio estuvo investida y poseída por el Espíritu Santo. Por eso todo en Maria procede y se mueve por el Espíritu del Señor». Cf. Ismael Bengoechea. "El Espíritu Santo en las palabras y silencios de María a la luz de San Juan de la Cruz". *Revista San Juan de la Cruz* 14, (1998): 187.

Francisco de Osuna provides existential detail for this union between Mary and the Holy Spirit. He explains that it is especially characterized by an interior silence and a dispossession of the natural faculties: «Esta sabiduría, que es el gusto dulce de las cosas celestiales, alcanzado por experiencia, mejor se recibe cuando esté más vacuo el corazón de todas las otras cosas; y cesan no solamente las obras exteriores, mas también las interiores, evacuando la propia operación acerca de las criaturas para ser ocupados y llenos de la operación del Espíritu Santo. Quien más perfectamente tuvo la experiencia de esto fue la Virgen sin mancilla, cuando todo se evacuó y ofreció su corazón muy limpio, vacío de toda operación distractiva, para que en aquella descensión del Espíritu Santo sobre ella la virtud de Dios causase en su corazón con tinieblas divinales, y puesta a la sombra de ellas, concibiese al hijo de Dios».

Cf. Francisco de Osuna, *Tercer abecedario espiritual (edición digital)* (1527, 2000),

<https://bibliotecadeespiritualidadymeditacion.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/francisco-de-osuna-abecedario-espiritual.pdf>, Treatise 4,5.

³⁶² Laurentin, 151. Other important thinkers provide a foundation for this thesis. The 19th century theologian Mathias Scheeben will say that Mary is the organ of the Spirit in analogous manner to the humanity of Jesus being the organ of the Word. Cf. Aidan Nichols. *Romance and system: The theological synthesis of Matthias Joseph Scheeben*. Denver, CO: Augustine Inst Press, 2010, 475. St Maximilian Kolbe would call Mary a «quasi-Incarnation» of the Holy Spirit. Kolbe avoided heterodoxy by using the term "quasi" or "in a manner of speaking". Cf. Kowalczyk. "Lo Spirito Santo, presenza silenziosa nella Trinità e in noi", 84.

³⁶³ «Aquella gran merced que hizo Dios a la Virgen María en la concepción del Hijo de Dios la llamó el ángel San Gabriel obumbración del Espíritu Santo [...] Para entender bien cómo sea este hacimiento de sombra de Dios [...] es de saber que cada cosa tiene y hace la sombra conforme al talle y propiedad de la misma cosa. Si la cosa es opaca y oscura, hace sombra oscura, y si la cosa es clara y sutil, hace la sombra clara y sutil [...] Según esto, ¿cuáles serán las sombras que hará el Espíritu Santo a esta alma de las grandezas de sus virtudes y atributos, estando tan cerca de ella?» Cf. LIB 3,12-13.

Dios en sombra»³⁶⁴. According to the logic of Juan de la Cruz, this means that the Holy Spirit, in overshadowing Mary, gave her a share in his attribute of silence. Thus, from the insights of Laurentin and Juan de la Cruz, we can deduce that Mary became the clearest transparency of the silence of the Holy Spirit in a human person³⁶⁵.

Dariusz Kowalczyk summarizes the connection, explaining how in Mary we can glimpse the face of the silent Spirit:

«Possiamo immaginare Maria che nel silenzio scopre sempre di più la presenza gratuita e silenziosa dello Spirito che la riempie non soltanto dal momento dell' Annunciazione ma fin dall'immacolata concezione. Nonostante ciò, neanche Maria vede il volto dello Spirito ma, osiamo dire, che Ella avrebbe potuto veder lo guardandosi allo specchio. Sì! In Maria, accogliente, santa, paziente, silenziosa, discepola, possiamo percepire il volto dello Spirito»³⁶⁶.

Thus, the pneumatological principle is perhaps the clearest window into Mary's silence.

3.1 Mystical silence

Mary's union with the Holy Spirit means she participates in the mystical life to the fullest degree possible. «Estando llena de gracia y dotada de una singular experiencia, que podríamos llamar mística, en el sentido más fuerte del término»³⁶⁷. For this reason, the mystics have a unique perspective on Mary's life of silent contemplation and develop it in their teaching³⁶⁸.

Earlier in this study, we outlined the characteristics of Hesychasm³⁶⁹. The term *Hesychast* derives from the Greek word for silence. It is a mystical school predominant in the Eastern Christian tradition, which seeks union with God in ceaseless prayer obtained through the interior silence of the faculties. For the principal teacher of Hesychasm, St. Gregory

³⁶⁴ LIB 3,14.

³⁶⁵ Isabel de la Trinidad seemed to intuit this as well in the meditation for her "Last Retreat" «Fue su alma tan sencilla... Sus movimientos son tan profundos que no se les puede descubrir. Parece reproducir en la tierra la vida del Ser divino, el Ser simple. También ella es tan transparente, tan luminosa, que se la tomaría por la luz, aun que no es más que el «espejo» del Sol de justicia» Últimos ejercicios día 15. Santa Isabel de la Trinidad. *Obras completas*. trad. Fortunato Antolín, Madrid: EDE, 1986, 169.

³⁶⁶ Kowalczyk. "Lo Spirito Santo, presenza silenziosa nella Trinità e in noi", 84.

³⁶⁷ Luigi de Cándido. "Vida Consagrada". En *Nuevo diccionario de Mariología*, dirigido por Stefano de Fiores and Salvatore Meo. 2a ed. Madrid: San Pablo, 1988, 1489.

³⁶⁸ Balthasar explains Mary's mystical-contemplative role as linked essentially to maternity: «Y, ciertamente, la actitud de María es contemplación; pero esta contemplación es en su origen idéntica con la acción del amor y de la respuesta; es contemplación como seno maternal-virginal, que retiene en sí todo lo que se le ha dado y medita sobre ello, para entregarlo después, dándolo a luz, al mundo». Cf. von Balthasar. "Teología y Santidad", 212.

³⁶⁹ Cf. Section 3 of chapter II.

Palamas, Mary was the origin of this spiritual path. She discovered the way of interior silence that arrests all discursive activity and brings one to a contemplation beyond every movement of thought or emotional state³⁷⁰. Along with being the origin of Hesychastic prayer, Mary also attained the highest possible degree of mystical union.

Gregory's system of thought also provides insight into the content of Mary's interior life. According to Palamas, Mary had a perfect intellect, with all the gifts of a sage and metaphysician. However, she discovered that the highest science comes through non-discursive thought and so leads people on this same path:

«Palamas seems to suppose that, like Mary, the Hesychast is not someone opposed to metaphysics, but rather a 'purified' philosopher who knows that metaphysics or first philosophy is not the highest science of the human mind and heart. Instead, Mary leads the Hesychast towards non-discursive contemplation of the divine energies and to obtain supernatural virtues unavailable to the purely natural sage»³⁷¹.

Gregory proposes that Mary's intellect was emptied of natural discursive thought through the possession of the divine light, encompassing all knowledge³⁷². Her interior life was constituted by a «return to self in vigilance and constant prayer, beyond any thoughts, to see the glory of God, *“on the new inexpressible way skyward in silence of the mind”*-the Hesychast path»³⁷³.

We discover the mystical silence of Mary from a western, Carmelite perspective in St Elizabeth of the Trinity. For Elizabeth, Mary is the proto-Carmelite par excellence who lived a quiet, hidden life in constant communion with the divine presence. She will write for the feast of the Holy Trinity: «En profundo silencio, en inefable paz, en oración divina nunca interrumpida, rodeada toda de eternas luces se mantenía el alma de María, Virgen fiel»³⁷⁴.

³⁷⁰ Cf. Dan Streza. "The Mother of God - A Prototype of Hesychast Life - the exceptional point of view of St. Gregory Palamas". *Revista Teologica*, 2(2017): 142. According to Gregory's creative understanding, the youthful Mary, learning of the distressing state of sinful mankind through the scriptures and temple preaching, implored God to come down to earth and save the world by uniting himself to humanity. The prayer she was inspired to use to achieve this end was the hesychastic way. «Thus, the Virgin, trying to be convincing in her conversation with God, she invented and taught people a new practice, higher than human contemplation, and different from the known philosophical contemplation». Cf. *Ibid.*, 141.

³⁷¹ Christiaan Kappes. "The Doctrine of the Theotokos in Gregorios Palamas". En *The Oxford Handbook of Mary*, dirigido por Chris Maunder, Oxford University Press, 2019, 178.

³⁷² Cf. *Ibid.*, 178.

³⁷³ Streza. "The Mother of God", 144. Gregory states that God answered Mary's prayer through his becoming one of us in the Incarnation. It is the highest praise possible for the hesychastic way: «Through this hesychast experience, the Virgin has perfected her message for humanity, resembling God through deification and had persuaded God to make a body, similar to that of man, through the Incarnation. The speech culminates by praising our divine-human union and communion with God through flesh and blood, which is God's answer to the pious supplication with pure mind made by the Virgin». Cf. *Ibid.*

³⁷⁴ Poema 79 Fiesta de la Santísima Trinidad. Santa Isabel de la Trinidad, 364.

Later, Elizabeth will offer this same example of contemplative silence in the midst of Mary's activity in the world:

«¿Te imaginas lo que ocurriría en el alma de la Virgen cuando, después de la Encarnación, llevaba dentro de sí al Verbo Encarnado, al don de Dios...? Con qué silencio, con qué recogimiento, con qué adoración se sumergiría en lo más hondo de su alma para estrechar a aquel Dios del que era Madre»³⁷⁵.

Furthermore, this silence of Mary was not confined to certain intimate moments of solitary prayer. Elizabeth intuited that Mary lived this recollection in every moment. Her silence was, above all, a forgetfulness of self in all her activity. She writes of the mystery of the Visitation:

«Cuando leo en el Evangelio “que María corrió con toda diligencia a las montañas de Judía” (Lc. 1, 39) para ir a cumplir su oficio de caridad con su prima Isabel, la veo caminar tan bella, tan serena, tan majestuosa, tan recogida dentro con el Verbo de Dios [...] Ella, ¡su madre! Ella fue tan verdadera en su humildad porque siempre estuvo olvidada, ignorante, libre de sí misma.»³⁷⁶.

In general, the mystics intuit the silence of Mary as a paradigm for their spiritual desires. They seek her silence which welcomes the word, forgets self in all one's activity, and is transformed by the uncreated divine light.

4. Listening, receptiveness, and availability

Mary's interior silence is constantly stressed in the context of her capacity to listen. We see this throughout the gospel texts. Hers was a total listening posture that welcomed the angel's words, Elizabeth, the shepherds, Simeon, Anna, and her son. All her own words in these episodes are preceded and followed by a respectful listening silence³⁷⁷.

This attitude found its culmination in receiving the Person of the Word. It was not just God's words in Scripture that Mary listened to, but in silence, she received the Word who would become man. «L'acte de foi de Marie est accueil non pas seulement d'une parole, d'un message, mais accueil du Verbe de Dieu en Personne»³⁷⁸. In this sense, then, Mary's life is marked from the beginning by a listening silence that gives space for God's word to act, even to incarnate into history³⁷⁹. Pope Benedict XVI states: «Only in silence can the word of God

³⁷⁵ Carta 183. Ibid., 681.

³⁷⁶ Últimos ejercicios día 15. Ibid., 169.

³⁷⁷ Cf. Álvarez-Suarez, 40.

³⁷⁸ Michel Dupuy. "Le Silence du Marie Selon Berulle". *Bulletin de la Société française d'Études mariales* 52, (1996): 101.

³⁷⁹ Cf. Bengoechea. "El Espíritu Santo", 197.

find a home in us, as it did in Mary, woman of the word, and inseparably, woman of silence»³⁸⁰.

A contemplative silence that listens is synonymous with receptivity. This attitude opens Mary to the revelation which God promises to his little ones³⁸¹. The posture prepares her for the angel's message and leads to the climax of her response. Finally, this silent receptivity carries her to a total gift of self.

Later this same welcoming attitude is manifested in the charity she shows to her cousin Elizabeth and her openness to the couple's needs at Cana. It will culminate in her reception of Christ's word on the Cross, making her the mother of John and, through this act, the spiritual mother of all future disciples (Jn 19,27). Her receptive silence is an availability to the presence of God that makes her free to fulfill the divine will in every moment³⁸². It was a complete following of her Son and his own kenotic attitude³⁸³. It is the kind of silence that is not limited to certain moments but is a continual attitude of the heart.

4.1 Difficulties in feminist thought

The emphasis on Mary's silence manifested in her humble welcoming and listening stance has generated criticism in certain currents of feminist thought. They see it as modeling the stereotype of women in purely passive roles. American feminist theologian Elizabeth Ann Johnson provides an anecdote that helps explain this phenomenon:

«Speaking for a generation of women, American novelist Mary Gordon famously observed how in her Catholic high school, "Mary was a stick to beat smart girls with. Her example was held up constantly: an example of silence, of subordination, of the pleasure of taking the back seat." [...] "For women like me, it was necessary to reject the image of Mary in order to hold onto the fragile hope of intellectual achievement, independence of identity, sexual fulfillment"»³⁸⁴.

Johnson explains that Christ is the primary operator in this model, while his mother is the dependent cooperator. It concretizes gender roles in the Church, with men leading and teaching while women listen and follow. In this schema, a woman's main contribution is that of silent listening³⁸⁵. Sally Cunneen states how men have hijacked Mary's voice, using

³⁸⁰Pope Benedict XVI, "Verbum Domini.", 66.

³⁸¹ Cf. Léon-Dufour, 863-864.

³⁸² Cf. Castellano Cervera. "Ascolto e riposta ", 189.

³⁸³ Cf. Garcia-Murga. "Virgen feliz", 118.

³⁸⁴ Elizabeth Ann Johnson. *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006, 10-11. Quoting from Mary Gordon, "Coming to terms with Mary" *Commonweal* (Jan 25 1982): 11.

³⁸⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 36.

her silence for their own ends. «Mary has been largely silenced [...] like a good child, she has been seen but not heard. She has been the beautiful background of powerful and influential voice-overs, usually clerical and male»³⁸⁶.

While still critiquing the traditional portrayals of Mary, others have shown how her silence, rightly understood, is empowering for women. Feminist scholar Julie Kelso offers how Mary's silence can exult feminine subjectivity. Jesus' mother is a woman who judges for herself the words and events she witnesses, continually pondering them to discover God's ways and the deeper meanings (Lc 2,15;51). In this, Mary can be seen as a model theologian as well³⁸⁷.

Kelso summarizes how Mary was uniquely suited to a task that only she as a woman could fulfill. She approached the mystery of God in a holistic way characteristic of woman's thought. She brought flesh to the mystery, while the spiritualizing abstract notions typical of male reflection are incapable for this end. As an actualized, autonomous woman Mary could listen silently to understand the true notion of the divine in ways that others could not³⁸⁸. Kelso explains further:

«Mary is able to incarnate the divine, to make the Word flesh as it were because she is the one capable of listening to and producing speech that remains faithful to the flesh. Because she has attained spiritual autonomy as a woman, she is capable of participating with the father-god in the production of a divine child; she is the one capable of ensuring the “incarnational relationship between the body and the word”»³⁸⁹.

Through thinkers like Kelso, we see that Mary's listening silence is not detrimental to her dignity or her autonomy as a woman. On the contrary, due to her silent receptivity, she was perhaps the unique person on earth who could listen in the way necessary to bring flesh to the divine.

5. Joseph in union with Mary's silence

Mary's silence in the gospel finds a strong echo in her spouse, Joseph. Their relationship was marked by mystery, especially during critical moments. Mary was silent in front of the great revelation she had received and would not reveal to Joseph the hidden origins of her

³⁸⁶ Sally Cunneen. "Breaking Mary's silence: A feminist reflection on Marian Piety". *Theology Today* 56, 3(1999): 322.

³⁸⁷ Cf. Kelso. "Mary was preserving these matters", 54.

³⁸⁸ Feminist thinker Irene Irigaray sees this attitude as precisely the reason for the divine election of Mary, and of woman in general, for the most important task imaginable: «Woman/Mary is chosen because she is “the only one left who still has some understanding of the divine ... who still listens silently and gives new flesh to what she perceived in those messages that other people cannot perceive»». Cf. *Ibid.*, 63-64.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 60.

pregnancy (Mt 1,18-20). In her silent trust, Mary hoped against hope that Joseph would discover this mystery through another route³⁹⁰. Ismael Bengoechea describes this necessity:

«Era mejor que José entrase por vía sobrenatural en el orden de la unión hipostática del Hijo de Dios. Él había de ser testigo pasivo de excepción del misterio, había de colaborar en la crianza, formación, protección y vigilancia de Jesús Niño, y era importante que por modo divino estuviese enterado de la naturaleza, condición y misión de tan extraño ser sobre la tierra [...] Al callar María, habló Dios. Era indispensable que hablase Dios. Solo a Dios se podía dar tanto crédito y tanta fe»³⁹¹.

Joseph shares in Mary's silence. He is the just man who, with deep faith, refuses to speak or reveal Mary's secret in a situation that completely exceeds his understanding.³⁹² He does not consider himself or his rights, but his solution is the fruit of the kenotic silence of total renunciation, similar to his young wife and son (Fil 2,5-8)³⁹³. His silence will make it possible for others to enter into the mystery³⁹⁴. Patrice-Marie Mézière states that Joseph's silence of openness and receptivity was necessary so that the new life generated in Mary's womb could be welcomed by the world.

«Il silenzio di san Giuseppe, oltre ad essere custode del Mistero, è accoglienza e trasmissione dell'armonia-riposo di Dio. Il fiat della Vergine Maria concepisce il Figlio, il silenzio di Giuseppe L'accoglie; senza questo silenzio amante, che è l'unica accoglienza degna del Verbo eterno, l'Incarnazione del Verbo nel seno della Vergine Maria sarebbe rimasta vana, senza frutto per gli uomini [...] Nelle anime in cui il silenzio di Giuseppe genera l'armonia-riposo di Dio, Maria può generare la vita nuova del suo Figlio»³⁹⁵.

In his silence, Joseph gives a voice to Jesus. For if Joseph had not accepted his mission, Jesus would not have been able to preach. By law, an illegitimate son was not able to speak in public³⁹⁶. In his self-gift and welcoming stance towards the task of safeguarding the mystery and mission of Jesus, Joseph is the just man whose silence is constitutive of his justice³⁹⁷.

³⁹⁰ St. Thérèse of Lisieux will comment on the pure trust that constituted Mary's silence: «Maria, tu elocuente silencio que para mi es un concierto dulce y melodioso que me habla de la grandeza de la omnipotencia de un alma que no espera ayuda sino sólo del cielo». Poem 54,8. Quoted in Castellano Cervera. "Aportaciones ", 105-106.

³⁹¹ Bengoechea. "El Espíritu Santo", 197.

³⁹² Cf. Giancarlo Pani. "Giuseppe di Nazaret: il credente silenzioso". *La Civiltà Cattolica* 165, 3930(2014): 621.

³⁹³ Cf. Ibid., 622.

³⁹⁴ Cf. Patrice-Marie Mézière. "Il silenzio di san Giuseppe". En *Silenzio, polifonia di Dio*, dirigido por Barbara Aniello and Dariusz Kowalczyk, Roma: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2020, 179.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 183.

³⁹⁶ Cf. Pani. "Giuseppe di Nazaret", 619.

³⁹⁷ Cf. Román Llamas Martínez. *El Evangelio de San José*. Burgos: Fonte, 2019, 123.

Joseph would have also shared in Mary's mystical silence. Daily he was in contact with the ineffable mystery «hidden for all the ages» (Rm 16:25) and so lived in a climate of contemplation³⁹⁸.

«El silencio de San José es eminentemente contemplativo. Es en el silencio donde recibe las comunicaciones de Dios a través de la presencia de María y Jesús, cuya contemplación silenciosa de cada día le va introduciendo más y más en el misterio de Dios. Las más altas comunicaciones místicas se dan, se experimentan en el silencio más profundo»³⁹⁹.

It seems that the gospel writers are purposefully quiet about Joseph. His person is essentially hidden, spent entirely in the presence of the mystery of God in Christ⁴⁰⁰. «His silence is steeped in contemplation of the mystery of God in *an attitude of total availability to the divine desires*»⁴⁰¹.

6. Recapitulation

As seen in this chapter, Mary's silence is highly significant. The Scriptures show a reflective, contemplative attitude that guards the divine secrets and allows them to unfold in her life. The process culminates in a total self-emptying rooted in her son's kenosis. Mary's heart is the theological loci of her silence. Here she actively reflects in a way foreign to curiosity or vain speculation. Through this sapiential lens, one can also perceive Mary as a living transparency of the Holy Spirit and thus the clearest reflection of the divine silence.

Mary's union with the Spirit means that she is the embodiment of the mystical life. From this angle, we can learn about her silence through the testimony of mystics who see in her their prototype. Mary's silence implies fundamental attitudes of listening, openness, and availability, which we also see in the life and example of Joseph her spouse. So that these attitudes be inculcated in concrete life, I will present a pedagogy of interior silence in the next chapter.

³⁹⁸ Cf. Ibid., 121-122.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 127.

⁴⁰⁰ Pani. "Giuseppe di Nazaret", 619.

⁴⁰¹ Pope Benedict XVI, "Angelus message 18 December 2005," https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_ang_20051218.html.

V. Pedagogical tools for interior silence

The experience of Mary as the culmination of the mystical life does not mean silence is a gift meant only for her or an elite *mystical* group. Rather, Mary is the model for all disciples, especially those who strive to live a more contemplative existence of openness and availability to the divine presence. Mary and the mystics point people towards a common human goal. As seen earlier in the study, silence is at the origin of reality and, more specifically, of human nature. From the Christian perspective silence is both gift and practice. Thus, as human persons created in the divine image and likeness, silence can be a reality that is practiced on a concrete level, gradually opening the person to the divine action. In this final chapter, I will present pedagogical tools for developing interior silence. Experience shows that formation in silence occurs through great and often arduous effort. I will first look at the obstacles to silence. Next, I will investigate the theme of formation in silence from a communal standpoint, especially within the context of the contemplative life. I will then move towards a more individual interior formation.

We will explore interior pedagogical helps using the writings of a modern guide in contemplative practice, Martin Laird. He teaches that due to the nature of the reactive mind and inner commentary, one must meet interior noise with the stillness of awareness and receptivity. To foster this stillness, I will highlight certain bodily aspects in the practice of interior silence. I will also examine the approach of Juan de la Cruz with his teaching of *atención amorosa*. Finally, I will highlight the effects of practicing silence. It leads to an opening of one's interior faculties to the divine action. From this silence, one can regenerate their sense of self and inner integrity, disposing a person to greater compassion and receptivity towards others.

1. Contemporary challenges to silence

1.1. The external obstacles

In this section, I will explore the obstacles to silence to see more clearly the current situation which challenges the practice of silence. It will bring into relief the need for pedagogical tools, which will be developed later in the chapter. To start with, the most apparent threat to silence is excessive speech. There is a marked human tendency to escape silence through idle chatter that creates external and internal noise. This kind of escape would have been present from the dawn of verbal communication. People feel they must speak or lose their identity, as the quiet person often does not count in the eyes of the world.

Also, if they are not at the center of the conversation, a person often feels unnoticed or unloved⁴⁰².

However, with the advent of industrialization, the noise has increased. On a superficial level, the constant sounds of machines, trains, automobiles, and work equipment have made it difficult to find external silence outside of isolated country areas. During the 20th-21st century, the process has accelerated exponentially.

By the 1930'-40's, people had become accustomed to the constant sound of the radio⁴⁰³. This later developed into television, which generated even more noise, yet now with images increasing the impact. We have become oversaturated with news and information through this medium, receiving constant emotional stimuli that eventually leave us cold and indifferent because of its very excess. Nothing assimilates because one event quickly moves to another⁴⁰⁴.

With the proliferation of personal computers and mobile devices, the reality of noise has grown much more intense. It is now more interiorly invasive. Social media, in particular, provides an infinite variety of stimulating scenarios that constantly divert the user's attention, making it nearly impossible to focus for sustained periods⁴⁰⁵. Furthermore, the violent and pornographic images frequently viewed on these devices serve to disperse and destroy inner quiet⁴⁰⁶. José Ramirez observes that all these elements have developed into a kind of *conspiracy of noise*:

«Parece como si la sociedad tecnológica hubiera hecho de él [silencio] el enemigo que hay que confinar y suprimir. Nuestros espacios público y privado se ven invadidos totalmente por el ruido, el sonido y la palabra. Desde las calles y los medios de transporte hasta la intimidad de la vivienda [...] parece como si hubiera una política de colonización del espacio de silencio por el ruido, una conspiración de ruido»⁴⁰⁷.

⁴⁰² Cf. Ignacio Tamarit. "¿Hablar del silencio? ¿Estar en silencio? ¿Hacer silencio? Mente, corazón, espíritu". En *El silencio II seminario Desierto de las Palmas*, dirigido por Ignacio Husillos Tamarit, Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2007, 33-34.

⁴⁰³ Cf. Picard, 198.

⁴⁰⁴ Cf. José Antonio Pagola. *Silencio e escucha frente a la cultura del ruido y la superficialidad*. San Sebastián: Publicaciones Idatz Argitalpenak, 2001, 6-7.

⁴⁰⁵ Young people will have to deal with the consequences of this interaction with technology and social media, being formed from infancy with constant sense stimuli.

⁴⁰⁶ Cf. Rosa Ramos. "Silencio: Lugar sagrado de la escucha". *Concilium* 363, November(2015): 76-77.

⁴⁰⁷ José L. Ramírez González. "El significado del silencio y el silencio del significado". En *El Silencio Compilación de Carlos Castilla del Pino*, dirigido por Carlos Castilla del Pino, Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1992, 36. This was written before the internet and personal devices became commonplace. It seems even more true today.

1.2. The interior obstacles

Over and above the challenges that external noise-stimuli present, we must highlight the influence of interior noise. Jesus tells us that it is from within the person that the forces come which defile our inner integrity (Mc 7,15)⁴⁰⁸. «Arguably, however, the most deafening voice is a man's own; [...] Desires, fears, anxieties and obsessive worries, a treadmill of thoughts issue from a constantly chattering mind»⁴⁰⁹. The problem increases when one does not make choices toward silence but instead seeks to evade it.

People dread plumbing their depths and strive to avoid the existential questions which might disrupt their life⁴¹⁰. They flee from the silence because they do not want to confront what they will find within⁴¹¹. There are often wounds from the past and traumatic memories that one cannot face; the possibility of silence is a constant threat that these will surge up into consciousness. There is also a fear of the inner disorder that might be unveiled if distractions are removed. Furthermore, many anxieties lie dormant and can quickly awaken when the other noises cease. However, for many who are used to constant stimulation, it is the prospect of sheer boredom that drives them to flee silence⁴¹².

Beyond this, the persistent threats to silence often lie in the inordinate needs of the ego. From this perspective, ego could be defined as the inner forces of thought and emotion centered on self-preoccupation, which inhibit transcendence and communion⁴¹³. Cardinal Robert Sarah explains how the ego generates the most substantial noise. It wants to claim its rights and drown one in excessive concern for self. It drags a person into their past through the memory of failures and activates unhealthy interior responses⁴¹⁴.

Even the ways of approaching God and the spiritual life can become inner ego noise⁴¹⁵. San Juan de la Cruz writes about *las imperfecciones de los principiantes*; beginners on the

⁴⁰⁸ Cf. Kaufmann. "Silencio", 1666. Anselm Grün observes: «Exteriormente guardamos silencio, pero interiormente hablamos sin parar. En nosotros hablan los impulsos insatisfechos, las necesidades no atendidas; en nosotros hablan las emociones y los estados de ánimo que no han alcanzado el equilibrio; [...] la vanidad y la ambición. El silencio exterior no nos dice si hemos aprendido a guardar silencio interiormente y, en caso afirmativo, hasta qué punto lo hemos aprendido». Cf. Anselm Grün. *Elogio del Silencio*. trad. Ramón Ibero Iglesias, Sal Terrae: Cantabria, 2004, 43.

⁴⁰⁹ Tomlins. "Silence in Christian living", 175.

⁴¹⁰ Cf. Tamarit. "¿Hablar del silencio? ¿Estar en silencio? ¿Hacer silencio? Mente, corazón, espíritu", 34.

⁴¹¹ Cf. Ibid., 33.

⁴¹² Cf. Pagola, 11-13.

⁴¹³ This is not a scientific definition but rather a definition in terms of the ego's connection to interior noise.

⁴¹⁴ Sarah and Diat, *La Fuerza del silencio.*, 105.

⁴¹⁵ Cf. Caballero, 107.

spiritual path who inordinately seek their own satisfaction in the things of God⁴¹⁶. Furthermore, ideological positions often mixed with one's faith keep people locked into their ego-centric categories⁴¹⁷. Excessive attachments to certain ideas block the attitudes of docility and welcoming receptivity characteristic of interior silence. Only by quieting the egocentrism that is *louder* than any other form of external noise can one experience authentic human growth⁴¹⁸.

2. Tools for formation in silence

The challenges that we have outlined invite a reflection on how we can promote the value of silence despite these obstacles. One of the main helps for this is the practice of the contemplative life. Through the collective quest of seeking God in quiet contemplation, the need for silence is brought into relief and given definite orientation. I will first look at the nature of contemplative life in the Christian tradition; then, I will examine how new members, especially young people, can be formed in contemplative silence.

2.1. In the context of the contemplative life

For centuries specific groups within the major world religions have dedicated themselves to the search for interior silence. We often call this *monastic* or *contemplative life*. In the Christian context, contemplative life has the seeking of intimate divine union at its core. From the beginning, this quest contained a marked asceticism of silence. The early desert fathers studied in chapter two bear poignant witness to this.

The tendency in the desert communities towards silence was not originally a disciplinary imposition. This emphasis would come later in the tradition. Instead, the early monks sought silence as a value flowing from their search for divine union. They practiced it so as to give themselves entirely to God's presence and hear his word. The silence extended into the total renouncement of their ego and proper will. It enabled an attitude of vigilance towards the Kingdom of God within (Lc 17,21). These inner goals would become the sole motive for whatever discipline of external silence they practiced⁴¹⁹.

⁴¹⁶ Cf. 1N 1-7. 1N 6 treating of «gula espiritual» is especially enlightening in showing how ego works its way into the spiritual life. One finds here what might be called today a species of *spiritual narcissism*.

⁴¹⁷ Pope Francis indicates what constitutes this ideological noise: «The faith passes, so to speak, through a distiller and becomes ideology [...] And when a Christian becomes a disciple of the ideology, he has lost the faith: he is no longer a disciple of Jesus, he is a disciple of this attitude of thought. This, therefore, is the "spiritual, mental" thought process of one who wants to keep [...] the door closed» *Homily 17 october 2013*, <https://tinyurl.com/y6zca4ee>.

⁴¹⁸ Cf. Caballero, 11.

⁴¹⁹ Cf. Kaufmann. "Silencio", 1661.

Christina Kaufmann points out that seeking silence is intrinsically linked to the original divine silence⁴²⁰. Because of this, no form of Christian contemplative life seeks silence as an end in itself. Rather it is one part of loving communion and openness, together with the word⁴²¹:

«El centro del silencio es una palabra: el Verbo, hecho Hombre, el hombre Jesús. Desde ahí nace todo lo que tiene que ver con el silencio en la vida contemplativa: 1) Relatividad del silencio frente a la Palabra; 2) Silencio con uno mismo como camino o medio para llegar a la comunión con Dios; 3) Silencio en relación con los hermanos para llegar a la comunión con ellos en Él. 4) Silencio frente a todo lo creado para llegar en comunión con Él a la pacífica convivencia con la creación»⁴²².

From this loving communion will proceed the silence lived in the context of the contemplative life. It means we silence our critical attitude towards others, the way we judge according to our limited notions of how the community is living or how we think the other should live. Silence helps us leave the other in their freedom and mystery while facilitating reconciliation and mutual sharing⁴²³. Contemplative solitude and silence are an inexhaustible fount of healthy community living.

«La soledad nos facilita el encontrarnos en el ambiente de silencio interior necesario para que brote luego una palabra de amor, de comprensión, de aliento, de perdón y reconciliación. Es, además, una fuente de energía espiritual y psicológica que beneficia a cada miembro y a toda la comunidad»⁴²⁴.

2.1.1. A communal formation

One of the most significant tasks in the contemplative life is forming the new member, especially the young, for interior silence. The world continually generates new stimuli, so inner noise is constant in young people. Therefore, the prospect of interior silence will often seem unattractive. Nevertheless, the youth secretly crave this silence, especially that which

⁴²⁰ Cf. Cristina Kaufmann. "El silencio que celebra la fiesta del Espíritu". *Vida Religiosa* 66, 4(1989): 268.

⁴²¹ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 268-269.

⁴²³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 271. We see this idea highlighted especially by san Juan de la Cruz in the *Cautelas*, a synthesis of community pedagogy in silence. He directs these teachings to «El alma que quiere llegar en breve al santo recogimiento, silencio espiritual...» (1). San Juan states the following about interior silence in the community life: «Esta es que guardes con toda guarda de poner el pensamiento y menos la palabra en lo que pasa en la comunidad; qué sea o haya sido ni de algún religioso en particular, no de su condición, no de su trato, no de sus cosas, aunque más graves sean, ni con color de celo ni de remedio, sino a quien de derecho conviene, decirlo a su tiempo [...] Para que entiendas que, aunque vivas entre demonios, quiere Dios que de tal manera vivas entre ellos que ni vuelvas la cabeza del pensamiento a sus cosas, sino que las dejes totalmente, procuránte tú traer tu alma pura y entera en Dios, sin que un pensamiento de eso ni de esotro te lo estorbe [...] y acuérdate de lo que dice el apóstol Santiago: *Si alguno piensa que es religioso no refrenando su lengua, la religión de éste vana es* (1, 26). Lo cual se entiende no menos de la lengua interior que de la exterior» (9). Cf. *Caut* 1;9.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, 271.

leads to genuine dialogue and encounter⁴²⁵. The Church and contemplative life can fulfill these needs by offering a dimension of silence that opens one to reality at its deepest level⁴²⁶.

Br John of Taizé, speaking from his experience with the youth, points out that they are disconcerted with silence at first. However, when they see others around them practicing it, they become encouraged, and they adapt themselves quickly⁴²⁷. This experience and similar ones demonstrate that young people are truly capable of silence and contemplation⁴²⁸. Nevertheless, it also shows that they need good models and strong communal support to practice it⁴²⁹.

In terms of concrete application, one of the most important aspects will be learning to disconnect from the sensory stimuli that increase inner noise. A detox from music, digital information, and social media will be necessary to bring a pacification of the senses and a heightened ability to listen to the Spirit⁴³⁰. Also, a gradual healing is needed to address the wounds caused by the choice to use noise as an escape from spiritual and emotional pain⁴³¹. José María Rodríguez points out: «Necesitamos no estar constantemente asaltados por el último acontecimiento mediático, la última ocurrencia del ingenioso de turno, o la última llamada que requiere atención inmediata. Ordenarse en el uso de la tecnología es necesario»⁴³². This fasting from excessive stimuli is only a first step. Still, it is a necessary one for any genuine formation in silence.

Another essential component of a person newly initiated in silence is that they are inculcated with the truth of the divine indwelling. This makes possible the desire and the condition for living comfortably in silence. Without this foundation in God's presence, silence can seem an object of fear and loneliness, something to be avoided. If one is immersed in silence without an experience of a loving interior presence, there can be an adverse reaction and even psychological harm⁴³³.

⁴²⁵ Cf. Moriconi. "Introduzione", 10.

⁴²⁶ Cf. Painadath. "La fuerza transformadora", 36.

⁴²⁷ Cf. John de Taizé. "Sed de silencio. La experiencia de Taizé". *Concilium* 363, November(2015): 71.

⁴²⁸ Cf. Pope Francis states this clearly: «Many young people have come to appreciate silence and closeness to God. Groups that gather to adore the Blessed Sacrament or to pray with the word of God have also increased. We should never underestimate the ability of young people to be open to contemplative prayer».

Cf. Pope Francis, "Christus Vivit.", Par. 224.

⁴²⁹ Maddalena Santoro explains that the youth often need a gradual approach, not being put into isolation and silence all at once. Even perhaps using music and images to quiet the other interior noises so that the quiet voice of the divine presence may slowly emerge. Cf. Maddalena Santoro. "Silenzio e ascolto nel mondo giovanile d'oggi". *En Dio Parla Nel Silenzio*, dirigido por B. Moriconi, Roma: Edizioni del Teresianum, 1989, 139.

⁴³⁰ Cf. Kaufmann. "Silencio", 1663. I adapted her thought somewhat to fit the present-day reality.

⁴³¹ Cf. Keating. "Formation and Silence", 311.

⁴³² José María Rodríguez Olaizola. "Silencio, se vive". *Sal Terrae* 107, June(2019): 493.

⁴³³ Keating. "Formation and Silence", 313.

Also crucial in the process of initiation is the art of accompaniment. Persons are needed who can help educate the young and whom themselves have mastered the silent art of listening⁴³⁴. Through accompaniment, the new contemplative will find that their unconscious and involuntary habits emerge into the level of consciousness and responsibility. As a result, they will become disposed toward making free decisions ordered towards the divine will⁴³⁵. The freedom of making conscious decisions flowing from the riches of one's interior life will, in turn, draw the person to resolve to live silence more authentically⁴³⁶.

The process of formation in silence does not just implicate the newly initiated but the formator and the entire community which will accompany them⁴³⁷. The spirit of silent listening will need to be inculcated in each community member to facilitate the development of the person. Empathetic listening can be a powerful tool for the community to draw near to the interiority of the other and nurture their growth and sense of dignity. Benito Goya explains this aspect:

«L'ascolto empatico comporta precisamente una sensibilità eterocentrica per entrare nell'interiorità altrui e contemplare la realtà dal suo punto di vista. Questo ascolto profondo della sua esperienza è plasmato di attenzione, di benevolenza e di accettazione [...] Questo ascolto silenzioso è una conseguenza dello sviluppo della dimensione sociale e dell'amore oblativo che induce a mettersi a disposizione del prossimo, con una coscienza chiara della sua dignità»⁴³⁸.

This kind of deep listening is a silencing of one's interests to make room for the communication of the other. One renounces the desire to intervene, interrupt, and dominate the encounter. «This means cultivating an interior silence that makes it possible to listen to the other person without mental or emotional distractions»⁴³⁹. It cultivates esteem and a welcoming acceptance, inspiring trust and candor⁴⁴⁰.

In the formator and community, interior silence is a commodity that recognizes the person's transcendence, not trying to force them into a specific mold that the community

⁴³⁴ Cf. Pope Francis, "Christus Vivit.", Par. 291-298.

⁴³⁵ Cf. Gimeno. "La moral del sabio", 89.

⁴³⁶ The experience of the Carthusians attests to this: «Keeping silence is not a spontaneous attitude: it demands a conscious decision on our part. In order to enter into silence, one must really want it, and above all know why one wants to keep silent. If we intend to become men of silence, we must pursue it with a sense of responsibility». Cf. A Carthusian. *The Wound of Love*. Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1994, 61.

⁴³⁷ Cf. Pope Francis, "Christus Vivit.", Par. 243.

⁴³⁸ Goya. "Importanza psicologica dell'ascolto integrale", 113.

⁴³⁹ Pope Francis, "Amoris Laetitia", (2015), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia.html, Par 137.

⁴⁴⁰ Cf. Goya. "Importanza psicologica dell'ascolto integrale", 120.

feels would be beneficial or demand a perfection beyond their years⁴⁴¹. Instead, it creates an interpersonal climate of genuineness, caring, and understanding in which a person's own potential for self-guidance is released⁴⁴². This task demands the interior silence of openness and receptivity from the part of all⁴⁴³.

2.2. Individual interior formation

I will now develop how silence can be formed on the individual level and the concrete tools that will help this process. First, it must be stressed that a person needs an almost heroic commitment to pursue interior silence. The sheer tenacity and persistence of interior noise mean that it is not something achieved all at once; instead, it must be practiced continually. The Augustinian friar and professor at Villanova University, Martin Laird, has written extensively on what constitutes this practice. He bases much of his teaching on the tradition of the desert fathers and the Carmelite mystics⁴⁴⁴.

He begins by stating that human persons possess a silence which is deeper than thoughts and emotions. It grounds all mental processes, lying at the foundation of one's being⁴⁴⁵. Laird explains that there is no specific technique to practice contemplative silence; rather, there is a surrendering of our resistance which allows the already present silence to reveal itself gradually⁴⁴⁶. Disposing oneself to silence is the art of letting go. It is a stripping of all the obstacles which obscure our union with the God who is our center⁴⁴⁷. He compares this asceticism or methodology to a sailor. He cannot make the wind blow, but he can dispose of the sails so the gift of wind will bring him home⁴⁴⁸.

The *method* he proposes is to be still. In this stillness lies all our good, yet it is also our biggest challenge. «This is precisely where we meet the struggle of the human condition: we cannot be still. Even if the body can be still, the mind keeps racing like a runaway train»⁴⁴⁹. The problem with the mind is that it obsessively runs tight circles, creating the

⁴⁴¹ Cf. Pope Francis, "Christus Vivit.", Par. 243.

⁴⁴² Cf. Kevin Gerald Culligan. "Toward a Contemporary Model of Spiritual Direction: a Comparative Study of Saint John of the Cross and Carl R. Rogers". *Teresianum: Rivista della Pontificia Facoltà Teologica e del Pontificio Istituto di Spiritualità "Teresianum"* 31, 1(1980): 116.

⁴⁴³ Cf. Zembylas. "Sound of Silence", 206.

⁴⁴⁴ While maintaining a great respect for Eastern non-Christian thought and technique, he does not utilize these sources in the writings we researched for this chapter. Cf. Martin Laird, *Into the Silent Land: A Guide to the Christian Practice of Contemplation* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2006), <https://amz.run/5OKA>, 12.

⁴⁴⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁴⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴⁴⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 14. San Juan de la Cruz states «El centro del alma es Dios». Cf. LIB 1,13.

⁴⁴⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 11-12.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

anguish in which we often live. He calls this obsessive circling «watching inner videos», in which a thought steals our attention and triggers ceaseless inner commentary, preventing us from stillness⁴⁵⁰. Our focus is taken up with these «videos» which we repeatedly play. The most tragic aspect of this is that we identify ourselves with them, robbing ourselves of our true identity. Laird provides a vivid portrait of the internal dynamic:

«This inner chatter is something like a video that constantly plays in the mind only to be rewound and played again and again and again and again. For some it might be a predominantly visual sequence of distractions, for others predominantly aural, or a combination of both. The insidious thing about these videos is that they have a way of cultivating a psychological identification with them. We identify so thoroughly with this chatter that when we attempt to look within, we are actually looking at these videos, and we think “This is my inner life.” [...] The more we watch or listen to them, the more we identify with them, the more we live out of them and live them out [...] It can be tepid or it can be a tempest. It can be entertaining, pious, a horror story, or utterly humdrum. It does not really matter. This video, this inner commentary, is nearly always playing, with the result that we are nearly always watching it»⁴⁵¹.

For Laird, when we become aware of this process and want to bring our attention back, we often confront our thoughts with more thoughts, continuing to spin inner commentary. He calls this the «reactive mind» which reinforces the stronghold of ego noise. It does not bring us peace but only adds to the anguish and chaos⁴⁵². We must learn to meet our thoughts and feelings not with commentary but with the practice of stillness.

«We can just begin to see how contemplative practice gently loosens the knot of ego and calms the spasms of reactive mind. When we return our attention to our practice as soon as we are aware that our attention has been stolen, ego is less and less the focus of our attention. The television screen in our heads will continue its constant stream of noise and images [...] The practical answer is simple: let the television play. Simply do not watch it»⁴⁵³.

2.2.1. Practices of silence

In terms of concrete helps, Laird counsels first that we develop a habit of bringing our attention back once it has been taken captive by an inner video. It is important to emphasize that this does not mean an attempt to stop all thought. Trying to cease thinking tends to

⁴⁵⁰ Cf. Martin Laird, *A Sunlit Absence: Silence, Awareness, and Contemplation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), <https://amz.run/5PrQ>. 26-27., 26-27.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Cf. Laird, *Into the Silent Land: A Guide to the Christian Practice of Contemplation*., 61. He gives examples of what this often looks like in contemplative practice: «We notice, for example, our anger and how it is quickly followed by another thought that judges it: “I should not be having this angry thought” or “after all these years I still can’t let go of my anger” or “I thought I dealt with this years ago.” This aggregate of thoughts must also be observed, and we must each see for ourselves that part of the reason we can’t let go is that we whip these thoughts and feelings into a great drama that we watch over and over again». Cf. Ibid., 66.

⁴⁵³ Martin Laird, *An ocean of light: contemplation, transformation, and liberation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), <https://amz.run/5PrK>., 57.

simply generate more thinking. He cites the experience of Teresa de Jesús as an example of this futility⁴⁵⁴. Teresa describes it in paradoxical terms: «el mismo cuidado que se pone en no pensar nada quizá despertará el pensamiento a pensar mucho»⁴⁵⁵. Instead of trying to stop our thoughts, Laird suggests that we simply keep coming back to a place of stillness when we find that we have been robbed of our attention⁴⁵⁶. «The practice of bringing the attention back time and again creates what is called a *habitus* or habit, an interior momentum that gradually excavates the present moment, revealing over time the stillness that is within us all like a buried treasure»⁴⁵⁷.

The next tool is to simply observe our thoughts for what they are: illusory and inconsequential. The more we engage in contemplative practice, the more we see that the discursive edifice which seeks to draw us away from stillness is hollow⁴⁵⁸. Borrowing ideas from *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Laird explains that instead of confronting these insubstantial entities and anguishing over them, spinning more commentary which reinforces our self-preoccupied ego; we *look over their shoulder*. We act as if not noticing them and are searching for something else- the presence of God⁴⁵⁹.

Another concrete help in disengaging our illusory thoughts is seeing ourselves as a mountain in the midst of different weather patterns. Laird says that, like Mount Zion, we are God's dwelling place, a stronghold that cannot be shaken (Sal 125,1)⁴⁶⁰. So instead of engaging various thoughts, we shift our attention to ourselves as *awareness* of these thoughts, and we do not react to them. «We are Mt. Zion, the silent, receptive witness to all weather that comes and goes. Mt. Zion never thinks it is the weather»⁴⁶¹. The key is in meeting our thoughts with «calm acceptance, gentle indifference, and without commentary»⁴⁶².

⁴⁵⁴ Cf. Laird, *A Sunlit Absence: Silence, Awareness, and Contemplation.*, 22. The saint writes: «No puedo acabar de entender cómo se pueda detener el pensamiento de manera que no haga más daño que provecho». Cf. 4M 3,4.

⁴⁵⁵ 4M 3,6.

⁴⁵⁶ Another helpful perspective in this regard is that of Anselm Grün. He suggests that to liberate ourselves from the afflictive thoughts that militate against silence, we first acknowledge that the thoughts are simply there. We allow a thought to be present but then loosen our grip on it. One can put it to the side and choose not to allow it to take up any more time or energy. When it comes back up, one does not get angry or disappointed for failing to vanquish it, but it is simply another moment to let it go to the side. The interior noise of the thought can come and go, but it does not have to take hold of the person. Little by little, it will disappear from the horizon. Cf. Grün, 60.

⁴⁵⁷ Laird, *A Sunlit Absence: Silence, Awareness, and Contemplation.*, 21-22.

⁴⁵⁸ Cf. Laird, *Into the Silent Land: A Guide to the Christian Practice of Contemplation.*, 68-70.

⁴⁵⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 92. One is reminded of the reaction of Jesus during the episode of the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8,1-11). In front of the dramatic accusations and their life and death appearance, he maintains his inner stillness, not reacting to them, but by simply bending down and drawing on the ground with his finger. His inner attention was on a higher source.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁴⁶¹ Laird, *An ocean of light: contemplation, transformation, and liberation.*, 60.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, 92.

Laird also applies this to possibly bothersome exterior noises. It is possible to allow them to be present without obstructing our interior silence. If we react to external noise, think about how it *should not* be there, the injustice of the person making the noise, and other similar thoughts, what we are doing is tightening our grip on our ego preferences and adding reactive commentary. Instead, we can simply shift our attention away from the noise in stillness until the external stimuli no longer disrupts us⁴⁶³.

Ultimately, contemplative practice is for the sake of listening to God and opening oneself to his continuous loving action. Thus, the word of God is also a way of fostering interior silence and recollection. Attention to a scriptural text using the method of *lectio divina*⁴⁶⁴ can help move us away from stray thoughts and emotions that cause inner disturbance. The word «stabilizes one's interiority and gifts [the person] with rest, a rest that is an intimate relationship with the Trinity»⁴⁶⁵.

2.2.1.1. Connection to the body

Another tool that fosters the contemplative *habitus* is utilizing our body for the sake of inner silence. As corporeal beings, we know that there is no spiritual experience which does not also implicate the body. For Christians, the act of God taking on human flesh in Jesus has tremendous repercussions in the spiritual life⁴⁶⁶. The body has thus become «El camino de Dios [...] el camino *hacia* Dios». We cannot ignore it or, even worse, create «espiritualidades asesinas»⁴⁶⁷ that despise or harm it.

Thus, Laird is consistent with the incarnational aspect of the Christian faith in his emphasis on posture and breathing as an important aspect of our silence. He describes that the body's stillness helps facilitate the stillness of the mind. As we saw in chapter three, in the Hesychast tradition, there is a certain technique of bodily posture, sitting and inclining one's head inclined towards the chest, gazing at the center⁴⁶⁸. Ancient teachers also

⁴⁶³ Cf. Laird, *A Sunlit Absence: Silence, Awareness, and Contemplation.*, 43.

⁴⁶⁴ This is monastic practice dating back to the origins of Christianity, where a biblical text is prayerfully read and meditated upon, producing a spiritual dialogue and often an experience of contemplative rest.

⁴⁶⁵ Keating, "Formation and Silence", 314-315.

⁴⁶⁶ Adolphe Gesché boldly speaks of the *Christian invention of the body* because of the contribution the prologue to the gospel of John, and Christian revelation in general, has made to the understanding of the body. Cf. Adolphe Gesché and Juan Quelas. "La invención cristiana del cuerpo". *Franciscanum: revista de las ciencias del espíritu* 56, 162(2014): 216-218.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 219; 222; 229.

⁴⁶⁸ Cf. Chapter three of this study, footnote 178.

recommended using a small stool situated close to the ground; today, we would call it a «prayer bench»⁴⁶⁹.

Breath has a long tradition in Christian spirituality and practice. In the Scriptures, the creative spirit is called God's breath (Gen 2, 7). Later, the Risen Jesus will communicate to his disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit through his breathing on them (Jn 20,22)⁴⁷⁰. Focusing one's attention on exhaling and inhaling helps to still the mind. Laird counsels: «As the breath leads air to the heart (according to [the ancient] understanding of the respiratory system), so let the breath lead the attention into the spiritual heart that remains still in spite of whatever turbulence there may be in your thoughts and feelings»⁴⁷¹.

As another corporeal aspect, he proposes the tradition of a «prayer word» as a way to maintain inner stillness and keep our attention away from the inner videos. With the mind always working in some way, a concrete word will give the intellect what it seeks in terms of activity but will keep it from engaging in commentary, serving as a shield from thoughts, feelings, and boredom⁴⁷². The prayer word helps fulfill the Pauline injunction to «take every thought captive to obey Christ» (2 Cor 10,5)⁴⁷³. A word like «Maranatha» or a short phrase such as the Jesus prayer is recommended, yet one can choose with great freedom⁴⁷⁴. He goes on to describe the concrete use of the prayer word:

«At the time of prayer let go of all other concerns, recollect yourself, and begin to repeat silently the prayer word. Whenever you become aware that your attention has been stolen, gently return your attention to the prayer word. Thus begins a journey to the depth of the present moment that can never be fully fathomed»⁴⁷⁵.

Ultimately, Laird gives the following synthesis of corporeal techniques for practicing contemplative silence. First, we take a stable posture and several deep breaths to help calm the mind. Then combine the prayer word with the breath, whether saying it aloud or silently, so that they eventually unite. Next, we let our attention rest on the breath and the word, keeping ourselves anchored in the present moment. Finally, when we realize our attention has been stolen away, we gently bring it back and return to the present moment. Laird concludes by exalting the corporeal aspect of our spiritual practice: «The body is a great

⁴⁶⁹ Laird, *Into the Silent Land: A Guide to the Christian Practice of Contemplation.*, 31.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 34.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 36.

⁴⁷² Cf. Ibid., 43; 55.

⁴⁷³ Cf. Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ Cf. Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 43-44.

reservoir of wisdom. Something as simple as bodily stillness and breathing make a contribution of untold value to discovering the unfathomable silence deep within us»⁴⁷⁶.

2.2.2. Atención amorosa

Aside from these indications involving our corporeality, Laird also brings to the fore san Juan de la Cruz's teaching of *atención amorosa*⁴⁷⁷. It signifies a letting go of clear and distinct discursive concepts through an inner loving openness towards the divine presence. Laird introduces the method utilizing the words of san Juan «Traiga advertencia amorosa en Dios, sin apetito de querer sentir ni entender cosa particular de él»⁴⁷⁸. This practice of *atención amorosa* can be a practical way of entering into contemplative stillness⁴⁷⁹.

Juan de la Cruz teaches that after a person of prayer has passed a time of discursively meditating and working with one's imagination to facilitate recollection, there comes a moment when this ceases to be helpful⁴⁸⁰. One becomes dry and finds only a hard wall where one once enjoyed a consoling activity. San Juan explains that a person is incapable of praying as they did formerly and only desires to stay quiet in the presence of God⁴⁸¹. He interprets this as an invitation to a more contemplative-receptive practice of prayer that he names *advertencia* or *atención amorosa*.⁴⁸² In this practice, one ceases to make specific interior acts but instead maintains a kind of loving, receptive gaze of faith:

«Y así, entonces el alma también se ha de andar sólo con advertencia amorosa a Dios, sin especificar actos, habiéndose, como habemos dicho, pasivamente, sin hacer de suyo diligencias, con la advertencia amorosa, simple y sencilla, como quien abre los ojos con advertencia de amor»⁴⁸³.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 39. It is important to point out that the long tradition of corporeal self-denial in Christianity, while falling into extremes at times, is also a bodily way to facilitate silence. The renouncement of certain comforts and appetites are meant ultimately to train one to let go of thoughts and inner sentiments that lead to desolation and lack of faith. As Maurice Giuliani points out in the context of the spiritual exercises of san Ignacio: «Su penitencia no se realiza ya por medios exteriores que actúan sobre su cuerpo físico; sino por el control de los procesos humanos, que sin cesar corren el riesgo de sustituir con su impulso sensible la integridad del acto de adhesión, a Dios» Cf. Maurice Giuliani. *La experiencia de los Ejercicios espirituales en la vida*. Bilbao - Santander: Mensajero - Sal Terrae, 1992, 51.

⁴⁷⁷ This term was already coined by the Rheno-Flemish mystics of the 14th century but was significantly developed and enriched by Juan de la Cruz. Cf. Juan Antonio Marcos Rodríguez. "La "atención amorosa" en clave de presencia: Juan de la Cruz". *Revista de Espiritualidad*, 255(2005): 255.

⁴⁷⁸ D 88.

⁴⁷⁹ Cf. Laird, *A Sunlit Absence: Silence, Awareness, and Contemplation.*, 20.

⁴⁸⁰ Cf. Section 3.2.4 of chapter three of this study.

⁴⁸¹ San Juan especially develops this scenario in 2S 12-14.

⁴⁸² Cf. LB 3,65. Elsewhere he describes the contents of this loving knowledge as «noticia confusa, amorosa, pacífica y sosegada, en que está bebiendo sabiduría y amor y sabor» Cf. 2S 14,2. For the various synonyms of *atención amorosa* and their locations in the works of san Juan, one can consult: Cf. Marcos Rodríguez. "La atención amorosa", 255-256.

⁴⁸³ LB 3,33.

In this letting go of concepts and ideas, one connects with a more resounding interior silence that grounds our being, through which God communicates himself directly. All the thoughts and images, which were once helpful, now become just another cause of inner commentary which can hinder a peaceful, loving attentiveness to God.

What san Juan offers us in terms of a method of *atención amorosa* is to simply *deseñbarazarse* of the clear and distinct ideas the interior faculties are seeking to grasp. This is the more active aspect and even though it appears to some as spiritual idleness, it takes a genuine effort. «Y si, como habemos dicho, le hiciere escrúpulo de que no hace nada, advierta que no hace poco en pacificar el alma y ponerla en sosiego y paz, sin alguna obra y apetito»⁴⁸⁴. What subsequently unfolds is a loving reception of God's *noticia amorosa general*⁴⁸⁵.

It is difficult to follow this way because we are so accustomed to working and achieving, while in this practice, the effort lies in simply remaining present despite the lack of achievement. «Aunque no le parezca que hace nada el alma, está bien empleada»⁴⁸⁶. Juan Antonio Marcos describes the «method» of *no hacer nada* in this contemplative practice:

«En el silencio contemplativo la tarea más fascinante y más urgente es la de no hacer nada. No tenemos que pretender nada. No tenemos que conquistar nada. No tenemos que lograr nada [...] Basta mirar con amor, con los mismos ojos de Dios, desde un profundo silencio. Basta con asentarnos en la única práctica verdaderamente importante en los territorios de la contemplación: estar atentos de veras y de corazón»⁴⁸⁷.

The next concrete aspect san Juan gives us is the need for perseverance. In order to enter into the silence of contemplation we must stay constant and not give up when things become more difficult, rather we should entrust all the struggles to God⁴⁸⁸. «Los que de esa manera se vieren [en la practica de contemplación), conviéneles que se consuelen perseverando en paciencia, no teniendo pena; confíen en Dios, que no deja a los que con sencillo y recto corazón le buscan»⁴⁸⁹.

⁴⁸⁴ 2S 15,5.

⁴⁸⁵ «Y así, lo que antes el alma iba sacando en veces por su trabajo de meditar en noticias particulares, ya, como decimos, por el uso se ha hecho y vuelto en ella en hábito y sustancia de una noticia amorosa general, no distinta ni particular como antes. Por lo cual, en poniéndose en oración, ya, como quien tiene allegada el agua, bebe sin trabajo en suavidad, sin ser necesario sacarla por los arcaduces de las pesadas consideraciones y formas y figuras. De manera que, luego en poniéndose delante de Dios, se pone en acto de noticia confusa, amorosa, pacífica y sosegada, en que está el alma bebiendo sabiduría y amor y sabor». Cf. 2S 14,2.

⁴⁸⁶ 2 S 14,13.

⁴⁸⁷ Marcos Rodríguez, 183-184.

⁴⁸⁸ For san Juan in his Discalced Carmelite tradition, perseverance also meant staying faithful to the practice of two one-hour periods of quiet personal prayer each day.

⁴⁸⁹ 1N 10,3.

In conclusion, the asceticism or pedagogy of silence that we find in Martin Laird and Juan de la Cruz, is meant to lead us to practice contemplative silence for dedicated moments each day. There is, above all, a necessary discipline of consistency. Nevertheless, the true goal is to continue the practice throughout all of one's mundane daily routine. Therefore, Laird recommends that we resolve not to engage the reasoning-discursive mind when it is not necessary. He gives the example of commuting to work, shopping, shaving, cleaning, etc. One can practice contemplative silence during many types of activities, choosing stillness rather than spinning commentary with discursive thought⁴⁹⁰. In the end, practicing silence is meant to lead us to listening and openness to the Divine presence, attentive and available to the one who wants to communicate his very self. A presence, as San Juan continually stresses, «cuyo lenguaje que él más oye, sólo es el callado amor [...] y en silencio ha de ser oída del alma»⁴⁹¹.

3. The effects and fruits of silence

The interior threats that we studied earlier in the chapter mainly proceed from fear and a lack of authentic self-awareness. When one strives for silence, especially using a pedagogical approach as seen above, there can be marked restorative effects on the person's interior world. Martin Laird explains that a first direct result of this silence is the revelation that a person possesses a luminous space, grounding one's existence.

«Over many seasons of practice, layers of clutter are removed by the liberating dynamism of stillness itself. What is revealed is a vast, dimensionless floor space cleared of clutter, a space that we have perhaps never before seen. This clear floor space is and has always been the radiant ground of all [...] always present, pure, and simple»⁴⁹².

God's presence will flow into this space as gift, bringing a transformative effect on the inner life. Juan de la Cruz says that God's rays will shine in the person who has silenced and emptied their inner faculties. «Así como el sol está madrugando y dando en tu casa para entrar, si destapas el agujero, así Dios [...] entrará en el alma vacía y la llenará de bienes divinos»⁴⁹³. San Juan explains how the silence of the apprehensions and memory opens one to the *divinization* of the interior faculties. They no longer function according to ego-centric patterns of thinking and desiring; rather, they become supernatural and thus work according to God's desires.

⁴⁹⁰ Cf. Laird, *An ocean of light: contemplation, transformation, and liberation.*, 83. In a similar way san Juan counsels: «Las potencias y sentidos no se han de emplear todas en las cosas, sino lo que no se puede excusar, y lo demás dejarlo desocupado para Dios». Cf. D 116.

⁴⁹¹ D 99; 131.

⁴⁹² Laird, *An ocean of light: contemplation, transformation, and liberation.*, 92.

⁴⁹³ LIB 3,46.

«Por lo cual, las operaciones de la memoria y de las demás potencias en este estado todas son divinas, porque poseyendo ya Dios las potencias, como ya entero señor de ellas, por la transformación de ellas en sí, él mismo es el que las mueve y manda divinamente según su divino espíritu y voluntad. Y entonces es de manera que las operaciones no son distintas, sino que las que obra el alma son de Dios y son operaciones divinas; que, por cuanto, como dice san Pablo (1 Cor. 6,17), el que se une con Dios, un espíritu se hace con él, de aquí es que las operaciones del alma unida son del Espíritu Divino, y son divinas»⁴⁹⁴.

Thus, silence has the effect of helping us center all of our desires and inner faculties on God alone, becoming radically open to his action. Klaus Berger explains: «[Silencio] significa dejar todas las cualidades de querer, desear y trabajar hasta que no quede nada más que tener el puro y sincero sentido en Dios»⁴⁹⁵. However, as it is beyond the scope of this study to examine all the aspects of theological transformation in grace, we will look now at the human, experiential effects of practicing a pedagogy of interior silence.

For one, silence orders and integrates our interior in a fuller way than discursive thought. It *recollects* the interior powers of reason, emotions, and will. It brings them from dispersion back to their center in order to recuperate strength and become more effective. It is like a tree in winter that recollects its life-giving sap from the branches so that it can thrive⁴⁹⁶. «[Silence] makes things whole again by taking them back from the world of dissipation into the world of wholeness»⁴⁹⁷.

Paradoxically, silence facilitates the use of our discursive mind, rejuvenating our thinking so that it flows renewed and regenerated⁴⁹⁸. Silence keeps the mind still and focused to better accomplish the things proper to it: «thinking, inventing, writing, creating new ways to hold and heal»⁴⁹⁹. Juan de la Cruz explains that it opens one up to new levels of knowledge: «Por cuanto estas almas se ejercitan en no saber ni aprehender nada con las potencias, lo vienen generalmente [...] a saber todo, según aquello que dice el Sabio (Sab 7,21): *El artífice de todo, que es la Sabiduría, me lo enseñó todo*»⁵⁰⁰.

⁴⁹⁴ 3S 2,8.

⁴⁹⁵ Berger, 99.

⁴⁹⁶ Cf. Guerra. "Teología del silencio", 52. Juan de la Cruz coincides with this metaphor of the contemplative person as a healthy tree: «El árbol cultivado y guardado con el beneficio de su dueño, da la fruta en el tiempo que de él se espera». Cf. D 6.

⁴⁹⁷ Picard, 3.

⁴⁹⁸ Melloni. "La mística silenciosa", 11.

⁴⁹⁹ Laird, *An ocean of light: contemplation, transformation, and liberation.*, 10. San Juan de la Cruz indicates that once one has become divested of the interior noise of apprehensions and memories, the person will possess greater perfection in the necessary actions of each day. «Antes en las operaciones convenientes y necesarias tiene mucha mayor perfección. Aunque éstas no las obra ya por formas y noticias de la memoria, porque en habiendo hábito de unión, que es ya estado sobrenatural desfallece del todo la memoria y las demás potencias en sus naturales operaciones y pasan de su término natural al de Dios, que es sobrenatural» Cf. 3S 2,8.

⁵⁰⁰ 3S 2,12.

Passions and inner commentary only separate us from ourselves, yet silence can draw us back to our true self⁵⁰¹. It guides us by liberating a person from simply obeying external stimuli, opening to action from a place of freedom. It draws us to our true *originality* with our sentiments no longer being chained to the moods and reactions of others, instead experiencing the sentiments which flow from our authentic selves. Silence carries with it new creativity and gives access to the infinite interior riches of one's inner patrimony, recovering what is our own⁵⁰².

In terms of affective integration, silence pacifies us emotionally. It frees from anxiety and gives a sensation of interior fullness. One's inner contradictions find space and resolution within the silence⁵⁰³. This process leads to new stability and brings unity of vision to life⁵⁰⁴. It gives a more profound peace than simply the absence of conflicts or fleeting moments of joy. St. Thomas Aquinas calls this fuller peace "quietatio appetitus," the peace of not desiring inferior things because one possesses the true good⁵⁰⁵. Patricio Garcia sums up this unity of vision and the impact it makes psychologically, even if exteriorly one is engaged in a multitude of tasks:

«El hombre tocado por [silencio] recoge toda su actividad y la orienta hacia el único necesario. Puede ocuparse de mil cosas, pensar en innumerables tareas, pasar por diferentes templos [...] sin embargo, lo más hondo de él mismo está recogido, centrado en lo esencial, sumergido en lo indestructible»⁵⁰⁶.

This presence of silence does not negate the possibilities of struggles or crises; rather, it enables a kind of peaceful navigation through them. The person who possesses interior silence does not need to continually examine their conflicts or impose order on them. Ordering and resolution often occur in the silence without one being conscious of it⁵⁰⁷. It is a reminder of the moment in the gospel when Jesus was being threatened with death by some of his townspeople: *passing through the midst of them he went away* (Lc 4,30). Thus, interior silence makes it possible *to pass through the midst* of conflicts without being harmed. «Watchful inner stillness does not mean the absence of struggle, but stillness in the midst of struggle»⁵⁰⁸.

⁵⁰¹ Cf. Sarah and Diat, *La Fuerza del silencio.*, 38.

⁵⁰² Cf. Caballero, 103.

⁵⁰³ Cf. Picard, 53-54.

⁵⁰⁴ Cf. Caballero, 224.

⁵⁰⁵ Cf. García, 49. This can also be related to Paul Tillich's teaching on «Ultimate concerns». By this term Tillich signifies a singularity to one's object of faith/primary meaning in life. It is seen to determine one's existence in being or falling into non-being. Cf. Louis Hoffman and M. Shawn Ellis. "Ultimate Concern". En *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion*, dirigido por David A. Leeming, Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2018, 1-4. Silence could be seen as a path to enter one's ultimate concern and rest in this meaning.

⁵⁰⁶ García, 46.

⁵⁰⁷ Cf. Picard, 53-54.

⁵⁰⁸ Laird, *A Sunlit Absence: Silence, Awareness, and Contemplation.*, 55.

Juan de la Cruz states that the person of interior silence enjoys tranquility and peace of soul. Through the path of silencing the senses and spiritual faculties, we free ourselves from the harmful temptations and afflictive thoughts which only serve to rob our peace ⁵⁰⁹. «La cual el hombre nunca perdería [la paz] si [...] se olvidase de las noticias y dejase pensamientos»⁵¹⁰.

Perhaps most importantly, silence frees us from the self-preoccupation that closes us off from others, making us more open and compassionate. Martin Laird summarizes this reality:

«Contemplation is the way out of the great self-centered psychodrama. When interior silence is discovered, compassion flows. If we deepen our inner silence, our compassion for others is deepened. We cannot pass through the doorways of silence without becoming part of God's embrace of all humanity in its suffering and joy»⁵¹¹.

Thus, when a person practices silence in their interior, they become more available to act in a way consistent with the good of others. Silence opens up these possibilities because it is a doorway to, and fruit of, God's transforming love. It enables an entrance into the original compassion at the origin of all reality. «In silence, therefore, man stands confronted once again by the original beginning of all things: everything can begin again, everything can be re-created. In every moment of time, man through silence can be with the origin of all things»⁵¹².

As a summary of the effects described above, silence:

- a) Leads to the experience of the great spaciousness in one's interiority
- b) Gives space for divine transformation of the interior powers
- c) Centers one's energy and desires in God
- d) Integrates the interior faculties

⁵⁰⁹ 3S 6,1-3.

⁵¹⁰ 3S 6,4.

⁵¹¹ Laird, *Into the Silent Land: A Guide to the Christian Practice of Contemplation.*, 86. A concrete example of this is found in the experience of san Juan de la Cruz. At the end of his life, he became a victim of intrigues from his own brothers in the religious community he helped found. In one of his final letters, he describes an attitude of love in response to the pain of betrayal. It is a testimony to the serenity and compassion which blossoms from the silence practiced in *atención amorosa* «De lo que a mí toca, hija, no le dé pena, que ninguna a mí me da. De lo que la tengo muy grande es de que se eche culpa a quien no la tiene; porque estas cosas no las hacen los hombres sino Dios, que sabe lo que nos conviene y las ordena para nuestro bien. No piense otra cosa, sino que todo lo ordena Dios; y adonde no hay amor, ponga amor, y sacará amor» (Cta 6 de julio de 1591).

⁵¹² Cf. Picard, 6.

- e) Rejuvenates and perfects the discursive, thinking mind, opening up paths for greater knowledge.
- f) Liberates a person to experience their true self
- g) Causes affective integration, giving a deep sense of stability
- h) Resolves conflicts without imposition
- i) Gives stillness in the midst of struggle
- j) Frees from temptations leading to tranquility and peace of soul
- k) Liberates from self-centeredness, opening to greater compassion, and thus being available for others
- l) Allows entrance into the origins of all reality, making it possible to begin anew

4. Recapitulation

The challenges to silence are manifold. Exterior noise is one aspect, but the interior noise flowing from fears, boredom, and inner ego attachments is much more disrupting. The situation calls for a pedagogical approach in forming a person interiorly. Thus, various tools were presented which can help foster silence. In terms of formation for the contemplative life, help is found in the support of peers and others striving to practice the same silence. The empathetic listening of spiritual accompaniment is also an essential tool in formation in silence, as well as the welcoming and accepting attitude on behalf of each member of the community. However, the core of formation lies with the individual and one's commitment to practice interior silence. Through the help of Martin Laird, we see that a person must learn to manage their tendency to spin endless interior commentary. The key is not to react with more thoughts but rather to respond to them with stillness.

Furthermore, one must respect their bodily nature and involve it in their practice. Some tools for this are posture, a prayer word, and utilizing one's breath. Another approach is san Juan de la Cruz's teaching on *atención amorosa*, in which a person strives to unburden themselves of clear and distinct concepts and sentiments, resting in a quiet, loving awareness of God's self-communication. Finally, I concluded by examining some of the fruitful, transformative effects of interior silence.

Conclusion

This study has developed the theological and anthropological basis for the experience of silence, especially in its interior and contemplative dimensions. The investigation has confirmed the thesis that Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the mystics are models for an authentic understanding of Christian silence. The work has shown that the reality of silence is rooted in the divine nature, it is the original «beginning» from which the Word proceeded (Jn 1,1). Thus, it is also an object of Judeo-Christian revelation. Furthermore, silence is a base of what it means to be human, constituting the foundation of human consciousness beyond any particular thought or internal activity. Silence is part of the normal development of the human person, can be practiced, and has notable effects of interior integration. This opens one to attitudes of listening and receptivity which are essential to interpersonal communion, both human and divine.

This study has contributed to a fuller understanding of silence within the Christian context and helped draw out a pedagogy of silence according to representatives of this tradition. It utilized an anthropological-theological methodology, researching many aspects of silence under these fields. The resources investigated provided insights to synthesize and harmonize with the central thesis. There were lacunae in certain themes, such as a systematic treatment of silence in Mary. I believe chapter four of this work has helped bring together various aspects of Mary's silence, offering a more unified approach to the theme.

Some limitations were found in not being able to treat other important characteristics of silence, such as God's silence in the face of evil and suffering and certain negative aspects that can mar the experience of silence. These themes would have introduced too many topics to my study and not necessarily connected with the main material. Thus, I chose to focus on the positive, fruitful aspects of silence experienced in the depths of human interiority and the existential attitudes which flow from this reality. One could also investigate the perspective of non-Christian religious traditions, which I did not set out to do, as I wanted to focus on the theological attitudes of openness to the divine presence. Future research could strive to integrate these elements, especially leading to a deeper understanding of the connection between interior silence and human flourishing. However, my study of silence could contribute to ecumenical and interreligious approaches, helping to give a universal basis for the phenomena of silence in the human person.

Throughout this work, I have summarized the contents of each chapter in a concluding recapitulation. Thus, I will not simply repeat what has already been stated, but I will reflect on some of my research findings as they fit in with the central thesis.

1. Silence indicates the kenosis of God. This self-emptying is found in each of the three persons of the Trinity, but the divine kenotic silence finds its most clear personification in the Holy Spirit. He is the silent space wherein lies the mutual love of the Father and the Son. The Spirit is also the silent context in which human persons can participate in Trinitarian communion. He empties himself of his own voice, becoming the inspiration for the words and actions of others. The Holy Spirit eludes objectification and thus “disappears” within his invisible action on reality.

2. Silence is a significant part of the Judeo-Christian theological tradition. The psalms bear witness to an interior silence of searching and rejoicing in the divine presence. Wisdom comes through listening to God’s still small voice, especially as it is embodied in Elijah’s theophany at Horeb (1 Re 19:12-13). It is an invitation to break one’s molds, to be open to the reality God reveals, without being attached to former ways of thinking and judging. All of this comes to fulfillment in the life of Jesus. One can glimpse it in his interior through his trusting and kenotic contemplative prayer, leading to the total availability of the Cross.

3. Silence in mystical thought and theology unburdens the mind of distinct concepts and categories so as to fully listen to and receive God’s own reality. Discursive conceptual activity can serve the understanding but eventually hinders rather than helps an encounter with God. Negative theology is totally at the service of this encounter. It is a bold willingness to let go of everything that might get in the way. Darkness becomes light because it enables a higher light to shine within one’s interior, revealing fundamental truths. The experience of ineffability leads one to surrender the poverty of human language and radically open oneself to the reality communicated.

4. The Carmelite tradition embodies the intrinsic relationality of silence. For example, Teresa de Jesús had tried to attain interior silence for many years but became lost in the inordinate attachments that reigned in her interior. It was only in her rediscovery of the person of Jesus that she received the ability to enter into new depths of interior quiet. Likewise, Juan de la Cruz teaches interior silence as the path toward listening to the divine word. All his practice is ordered to contemplative reception of the divine mystery.

5. While the challenges are manifold, it is possible to grow in the practice of silence. Letting go of inner commentaries and videos can generate the fear of losing one’s identity, but it leads to a fuller embrace of one’s true self in the present moment. A pedagogy of silence is possible because human nature is made from and for silence. Generations of contemplative communities bear witness to this. The effects of silence on the human person

prove its fruitfulness, but ultimately, from a Christian perspective, God alone transforms the person according to his silent action.

6. Mary, as the model believer, recapitulates in her person the divine and human silence focused on in this study. Her attitude is a kind of active passivity. She receives the divine word and refuses to impose her own categories, yet she ceaselessly plumbs the depths of the mystery revealed to her. She is a window into the silent action of the Holy Spirit and his most faithful instrument. Thus, generations of mystics have understood her silent prayer as the means for the Word of God to enter the world.

While a devotional commentary generally falls outside the realm of an academic study, I conclude here with a brief note on how Marian spirituality might facilitate silence. Experience shows that it is a continual struggle to surrender to the divine inhabiting presence. By looking to Mary, one finds a maternal reassurance and a friend for the way. One can inculcate an awareness of her presence, encountering it as a refuge and guide. Through invoking her person and intercession she can help one's practice of silence, especially in moments of possible discouragement. Mary's place in one's silence in no way diminishes the intrinsic simplicity of contemplative prayer. On the contrary, as the Flemish Carmelite mystics Michael of St Augustine and Maria Peyt teach, one can have Mary present in the most profound contemplation. She facilitates rather than hinders the quiet simplicity in which God communicates himself⁵¹³.

Ultimately, this study has shown that while silence brings a sense of peace and well-being, in the Christian perspective it is not sought as an end. It is always relative to the experience of God's presence and being open to others. One can find in the mystery of silence a path towards personal growth. Still, from a theological standpoint, it is ordered towards listening, openness, and availability to a mystery beyond words or thought.

*Era cosa tan secreta,
que me quedé balbuciendo...*⁵¹⁴

⁵¹³ Cf. Ven. Miguel de San Agustín and Ven. Maria de Santa Teresa Petyt. *Vida de Unión con María*. Onda (Castellón): Amacar: Apostolado Mariano-Carmelita, 1999, 33-37.

⁵¹⁴ Cf. P- *Entréme donde no supe*.

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