BEING ATTENTIVE TO SILENCE

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SILENCE. STILLNESS. These are not commonly found in the often reckless rush of daily life. Even for those who are necessarily still in body—confined by reasons of ill health, disability or age—the pressure of thought surges on, carrying with it a tumult of emotions. Silence and stillness are even less present for those whose tasks in the world engage them in seemingly never-ending demands. Here, too often, in W. B. Yeats's words, 'things fall apart; the centre cannot hold'.[1] The consequence may be a suffering which can be ignored for a time—often an extended time—but which ultimately reveals its presence in the searing loneliness of the night, over coffee with a neighbour, in a visit to the pastor or priest, or in the doctor's clinic or psychologist's suite.

It has been a privilege to work with the people who have come to me in my capacity as a psychologist. For them things had fallen apart and the centre no longer held. On their journey to healing and transformation they learnt a number of skills that are pertinent to the issue I address here. *My clients learnt to attend to their interiority.* In other words, they learnt to pay attention to the felt sense of themselves in at least some of the various modes of functioning that occur in daily life. They then learnt to present that sense to God in prayer. They also learnt to value silence. Psychological practices of mindfulness became seamlessly interwoven with what the Christian tradition terms contemplative prayer.[2]

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[1] W. B. Yeats, 'The Second Coming', in *The Collected Works*, volume 1, *The Poems*, edited by Richard J. Finneran (New York: Scribner, 1997), 189.

[2] The term 'mindfulness' is a translation of the Pali word 'sati' and is synonymous with awareness. The practice derives from Buddhist teaching of the path towards enlightenment. See Anālayo, *Satipaṭṭhāna: The Direct Path to Realization* (Birmingham: Windhorse, 2003); Bruno Cayoun, *Mindfulness-integrated Cognitive Behaviour Therapy: Principles and Practice* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Coming to Our Senses: Healing Ourselves and the World through Mindfulness* (London: Piatkus, 2005); Daniel J. Siegel, *Mindsight: The New Science of Personal Transformation* (New York: Bantam, 2010).

My ultimate goal here is to articulate the value of being attentive to silence in this way, *en route* to an authentic interiority which values the felt sense of the body. I shall begin by considering awareness in the context of the many varieties of silence available for differentiation, and then turn to the impact of both the presence and absence of silence in our lives.

Being Aware of Silence

'Everything, it seems, has its own quality of silence'.[3] There are silences that exist between people, each with its own recognisable meaning:

> There is the awkward silence of the road trip with someone we do not know well enough to be silent next to, the refrigerating silence of hardened anger … the focused silence of absorption in our sewing or a good book, the stunned silence of seeing the status of our pension fund.[4]

There is the silence of lovers and the silence of those whose love has deepened and matured over many years. There are the silences of nature: the vast and utterly still silence of the mountains, the silence of the dark forest, the joyful silence of the flowing stream and the silence of the falling leaf.[5]

[3] Robert Sardello, *Silence: The Mystery of Wholeness* (Berkeley: Goldenstone, 2008), 15.
[4] Martin Laird, *A Sunlit Absence: Silence, Awareness, and Contemplation* (New York: Oxford UP, 2011), 46.
[5] See Sardello, *Silence*, 15.

'The absence of sound waves' characterizes each instance, whether in social or natural contexts.[6] Nevertheless each silence carries its distinctive meaning, for the particular character and circumstance of each silence communicates unique meaning. So, too, in the spiritual life, silence is the outer form of more profound dynamics that can be both healing and freeing. Even someone who is not a practitioner of meditation or contemplation can appreciate silence as a significant value: 'I can't think of anything lonelier than spending the rest of my life with someone I can't talk to, or worse, someone I can't be silent with'.[7]

The psalmist calls us to 'be still' and thereby to know God (Psalm 46:10). The saints cherish silence, and monasteries maintain a 'Great Silence'.[8] Such silence develops an interiority that is foundational to the spirituality of the withdrawn contemplative and the person in active ministry alike. The Carthusian's physical cell is carried metaphorically in the hearts of many who respond to the call of God.[9] Such was the lesson that the mystic and activist Catherine of Siena conveyed to her biographer Raymond of Capua, when she encouraged him to 'Make yourself a cell in your own mind from which you need never come out'.[10]

Down through the ages stillness and silence have been presented as the context for an encounter with God. For Blessed John Ruysbroeck the experience of the stillness of God is that of a 'dark silence in which all lovers lose themselves'.[11] Using the paradoxical imagery of the mystic, St John of the Cross refers to his Beloved as 'silent music, sounding solitude'.[12] Thomas Merton's experience in the quiet solitude of his hermitage powerfully depicts the way in which silence calls the lover of God:

> I live in the woods out of necessity. I get out of bed in the middle of the night because it is imperative that I hear the silence of the night, alone, and, with my face on the floor, say psalms, alone, in the silence of the night.[13]

6 Laird, *A Sunlit Absence*, 46.
7 Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrows, *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2009), 7.
8 See the *Rule of St Benedict*, chapter 42.
9 Brian O'Leary, 'Ignatian Mysticism and Contemporary Culture', *The Way*, 52/4 (October 2013), 53.
10 Blessed Raymond of Capua, *The Life of St Catherine of Siena*, translated by George Lamb (London: Harvill, 1960), 43.
11 Jan van Ruysbroeck, *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage; The Sparkling Stone; The Book of Supreme Truth*, edited by Evelyn Underhill (Whitefish: Kessinger, 1992), 178.
12 St John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, in *The Collected Works of St John of the Cross*, edited and translated by Kieran Kavanagh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, DC: ICS, 1991), 412.
13 Thomas Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life* (New York: HarperOne, 1998), 240.

St Teresa of Ávila encourages us to imitate the saints in their 'striving after solitude and silence'.[14] Those who do so eventually find that the spiritual journey brings an intimacy with God in which they can 'rejoice together in the deepest silence'.[15] Importantly, Teresa instructs her sisters to 'enter in' to the marvellous interior castle of the soul, despite the seeming absurdity that 'clearly one doesn't have to enter it since it is within oneself'.[16] Teresa explains, however, that such an instruction is necessary because 'there are souls … so accustomed to being involved in external matters that there is no remedy, nor does it seem they can enter within themselves'.[17] The revelation of the world within is denied to such people, preoccupied as they are with the world without. The phenomenon of interiority is opaque to them, totally removed from their world-view. Many of us can identify with Teresa's observation. Life, at least outside monastic constraints, does indeed create so many distractions that it is difficult for us to 'enter in'. Self-awareness is very important to this process, as St Catherine of Siena acknowledged with her frequent references to the value of the 'cell of self-knowledge'.[18] Often the first hurdle to overcome is that of anxiety, an anxiety that paradoxically appears both in the presence and the absence of silence.

Silence and Anxiety

Silence is 'real enough to be afraid of'.[19] For silence exposes us to the noise within:

> … the incessant inner talking that goes on; the continual churning of our emotions; angers that have gone unresolved for years; envies, hatreds and desires, bad memories, pains and hurts, deceits we have justified to ourselves.[20]

Such exposure upsets our seeming equilibrium; it generates anxiety. This was my clients' experience, until they learnt how to accept the noise and chatter of their interiority and to allow silence to transform their inner space; for silence both forms and transforms us.

[14] St Teresa of Ávila, 'The Book of Her Life', 13.7, in *The Collected Works of St Teresa of Ávila*, translated by Kieran Kavanagh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, DC: ICS, 1976–1985), volume 1, 125.
[15] St Teresa of Ávila, 'The Interior Castle', 7.3.11, in *Collected Works*, volume 2, 442.
[16] St Teresa of Ávila, 'The Interior Castle', 1.1.5, in *Collected Works*, volume 2, 285.
[17] St Teresa of Ávila, 'The Interior Castle', 1.1.6, in *Collected Works*, volume 2, 286.
[18] See St Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, translated by Suzanne Noffke (Mahwah: Paulist, 1980), 25 and elsewhere; Meredith Secomb, 'The Role of the "Cell of Self-Knowledge" in the Authority of Catherine of Siena', *Magistra: A Journal of Women's Spirituality in History*, 9/2 (2003), 41–54.
[19] Laird, *A Sunlit Absence*, 47.
[20] Sardello, *Silence*, 37.

Foundational to my clients' acceptance and subsequent exploration of their experience was learning how to accept the bodily sensations that accompanied their exposure to interiority. In so doing they discovered depths of which they were not previously aware and which provided a paradoxically firm foundation for subsequent psychological development. Acceptance of the anxiety that accompanied the stillness and silence of darkness, emptiness and unknowing provided the first step towards the expression of a life lived with a new level of authenticity and assurance.

While the *presence* of silence can generate anxiety, it is a paradoxical reality that the *absence* of silence can also do so. Being attentive to the depths of interior silence supports our sense of our unique individuality. When we are unable to achieve that degree of attentiveness we experience anxiety:

> Our anxiety comes from our bodily experience of being reduced to the likeness of everyone else, of being completely forgetful of the touch that gives us a unique sensing of our bodily presence in the world. All the adornments, make-up, clothing, and accoutrements can never individualize the way we sense the fullness of our embodied being.[21]

In the overly extroverted drive to attend to matters exterior to our core sense of self we can lose touch with what makes us distinctive. This loss generates anxiety. There is a further reason for such anxiety: it derives not only from succumbing to social pressures, but also from the failure to recognise the foundational reality that our being is grounded in God.

[21] Sardello, *Silence*, 37.

The Contemplative Awareness of Silence

In the ground of our being is an unassailable union with God, a union created by the gifts of creation and redemption. For very many of us, however—even those professing a Christian faith—the transforming, experiential reality of this truth is rarely available for reflection. Martin Laird is in a centuries-long line of teachers who point to the reason for this sad state of affairs. Our interior 'noise and chatter' delude us into thinking we are separated from God.[22] Awareness will help to cleanse the window of our heart, enabling us thereby to see infinity in all that is.[23]

The practice of contemplation is a time-honoured means of developing an awareness that accesses the still and silent depths within. The silence to which contemplative prayer exposes us is not merely the absence of sound. Silence is a portal through which we touch the depths of reality. Isaiah tells us: 'In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength' (Isaiah 30:15). Then, like a modern-day contemplative, he laments the Israelites' preference for the noise and din of activity, for taking things into their own hands (Isaiah 30:16). Such ego-centred, self-determined activism ensures the loss of all capacity to be attentive to interiority. Only the ego-surrendered self is capable of such attentiveness.

Silence is a portal through which we touch the depths of reality

Contemplative practice enables us to develop this attentiveness. While many teachers start from techniques for focusing on a prayer word, phrase or sound, for Laird it is the expansion of awareness that occurs through interior silence which is really the liberating dynamic:

> It is the blossoming within awareness … of the flowing luminous vastness that is interior silence. This silent, flowing awareness is untouched by noise and turmoil and yet at the same time is generous and open enough to ground both calm and calamity.[24]

This awareness is not an awareness *of* objects, whether internally or externally perceived, 'but the simple opening up from within of the ground of awareness'.[25] It has depth, described most adequately by the strongly apophatic and paradoxical language of Meister Eckhart: 'breadth without

[22] Laird, *A Sunlit Absence*, 3.
[23] See St John of the Cross, 'The Ascent of Mount Carmel', 2.5.9, in *Collected Works*, 164.
[24] Laird, *A Sunlit Absence*, 6.
[25] Laird, *A Sunlit Absence*, 14.

breadth, an expanseless expanse'.[26] It enables us to see beyond our thoughts to what grounds them. There, in the purity of the awareness thus experienced, is a spaciousness that yields both solitude and love.[27]

The theme of stillness and silence is central to the tradition of the Eastern Orthodox Church. They speak of stillness or *hesychi*a:

> *Hesychia* signifies concentration combined with inward tranquility. It is not merely to be understood in a negative sense as the absence of speech and outward activity, but it denotes in a positive way the openness of the human heart towards God's love.[28]

It is one of a number of virtues identified as a prerequisite for prayer: 'He who practices hesychasm must acquire the following five virtues, as a foundation on which to build: silence, self-control, vigilance, humility and patience'.[29] It is also the outcome of the exercise of detachment wherein 'in indescribable silence' the practitioner may dwell in the blessed glory of God.[30] It provides the context within which God is revealed, for 'perfect silence alone proclaims Him'.[31] Hence in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, as in the West, silence is not of value in itself but serves intentionality in its efforts to focus on its beloved objective.[32]

There is, however, another approach to silence. It is the approach that values the experience of silence as a *Ding an sich*, a thing in itself. I now consider the reality and value of silence before reflecting on the way in which we can enter into and resonate with silence in itself.

The Reality of Silence

Silence is real. It is *intelligible*; in Bernard Lonergan's terms, it is an experience upon which we can reflect and about which we can come to

[26] Meister Eckhart, Sermon 29, in *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*, translated by Maurice O'C. Walshe (New York: Crossroad, 2009), 178, cited in Laird, *A Sunlit Absence*, 18.
[27] Laird, *A Sunlit Absence*, 19.
[28] Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary, 1996), 122.
[29] Gregory of Sinai, 'On Commandments and Doctrines, Warnings and Promises; On Thoughts, Passions and Virtues, and also on Stillness and Prayer: One Hundred and Thirty-Seven Texts', in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, edited by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1983), volume 1, 233.
[30] Nikitas Stithatos, 'On the Practice of the Virtues: One Hundred Texts', in *Philokalia*, volume 1, 103.
[31] Maximos the Confessor, 'Various Texts on Theology, the Divine Economy, and Virtue and Vice', in *Philokalia*, volume 1, 271.
[32] By 'intentionality' I mean the awareness of desire towards God. For Bernard Lonergan's explanation of the psychological sense of intentionality, see Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: U. of Toronto P, 1971), 7.

a correct understanding.[33] Just as the pause is as pregnant with meaning as the music that preceded it, so silence is as real as the sound that surrounds and permeates it.

'The One, the Good, the True, and the Beautiful', Hans Urs von Balthasar writes: 'these are what we call the transcendental attributes of Being, because they surpass all the limits of essences and are coextensive with Being'.[34] Beauty is present wherever truth and goodness are found; it 'dances as an uncontained splendour around the double constellation of the true and the good'.[35] Unity is present, too, for the vision of the mystic recognises the graced coherence in all that is made. I would like to suggest that silence may be considered as yet another transcendental attribute of Being since, for those with the sensitivity and capacity for stillness, the form of silence can be perceived analogously to the form of beauty.

Balthasar reflects on our perception of beauty: 'The beautiful is above all a *form*, and the light does not fall on this form from above and from outside, rather it breaks forth from the form's interior'.[36] A form, for Balthasar, 'means a totality of parts and elements … which for its existence requires not only a "surrounding world" but ultimately being as a whole'.[37] It is beautiful because it is a 'sign and appearing of a depth and a fullness … that remain both beyond our reach and our vision'.[38] Beauty is a paradoxical 'inwardness that appears', in which we perceive a 'non-manifested depth'.[39] In the poet's words, beauty reveals 'the dearest freshness deep down things'.[40]

Beauty is not, however, alone in this capacity to reveal depth. Silence, too, reveals it. The phenomenologist and psychologist Robert Sardello observes, 'In Silence everything displays its depth, and we find that we are part of the depth of everything around us'.[41]

[33] See Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Theory of Human Understanding*, edited by Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: U. of Toronto P, 1992), 695–696.
[34] Hans Urs von Balthasar, 'A Résumé of My Thought', in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, edited by D. L. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 3.
[35] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, volume 1, *Seeing the Form*, translated by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982), 18.
[36] Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord*, volume 1, 151. The emphasis is his.
[37] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, volume 4, *The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity*, edited by John Riches, translated by Brian McNeil and others (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 29.
[38] Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord*, volume 1, 118.
[39] Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord*, volume 1, 442.
[40] Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'God's Grandeur', in *Poems and Prose* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), 27.
[41] Sardello, *Silence*, 11.

The Touch of Silence

Silence reaches us in many ways. For Gerard Manley Hopkins it may be heard as music:

> Elected Silence, sing to me
> And beat upon my whorlèd ear,
> Pipe me to pastures still and be
> The music that I care to hear.[42]

The 'silent music' of St John of the Cross is another instance of the spiritual capacity to 'hear' silence. However, while hearing is often associated with the mystical perception of silence, it is the sense of touch which is primarily privileged with such acuity. Both Robert Sardello and Hans Urs von Balthasar emphasize this. For Sardello silence is felt 'as a kind of touch'.[43] For Balthasar, following Aquinas, 'Touch (and, close to it, taste and smell) is the "root of the senses" … because, through it, what is living feels itself even as it feels other things'.[44]

Balthasar is writing here about perception not through the literal but through the 'spiritual senses'.[45] Origen was the first to develop the concept of the spiritual senses, arguing that there exists a 'general sense for the divine' with features that parallel those of our five natural senses. This general sense is likewise subdivided into five: 'a sense of sight to contemplate supernatural things … a sense of hearing which perceives voices that do not resound in the exterior air; a sense of taste … of smell … of touch.'[46] Augustine, too, spoke of these senses as he wrestled to articulate what he loved when he loved his God:

> Not material beauty or beauty of a temporal order; not the brilliance of earthly light, so welcome to our eyes; not the sweet melody of harmony and song …. It is not these that I love when I love my God. And yet, when I love him, it is true that I love a light of a certain

[42] Hopkins, 'The Habit of Perfection', in Hopkins, *Poems and Prose*, 5.
[43] Sardello, *Silence*, 35.
[44] Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord*, volume 1, 394.
[45] See Balthasar, 'The Spiritual Senses', in *Glory of the Lord*, volume 1, 365–425; Stephen Fields, 'Balthasar and Rahner on the Spiritual Senses', *Theological Studies*, 57 (1996): 224–241; Karl Rahner, 'The Doctrine of the "Spiritual Senses" in the Middle Ages', in *Theological Investigations*, volume 16, *Experience of the Spirit: Source of Theology*, translated by David Morland (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1979), 104–134; Karl Rahner, 'The "Spiritual Senses" according to Origen', in *Theological Investigations*, volume 16, *Experience of the Spirit*, 81–103.
[46] Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.48, cited in Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord*, volume 1, 368.

> kind, a voice, a perfume, a food, an embrace; *but they are of the kind that I love in my inner self*, when my soul is bathed in light that is not bound by space; when it listens to sound that never dies away; when it breathes fragrance that is not borne away on the wind; when it tastes food that is never consumed by the eating; when it clings to an embrace from which it is not severed by fulfilment of desire. This is what I love when I love my God.[47]

In the experience of the spiritual senses our loving intention towards God and attentive receptivity to God's love for us are accompanied by highly refined *interoceptive* dimensions that are best referred to in terms of touch. The psychological term 'interoceptive' typically refers to stimuli that occur within the body, such as muscle tension or visceral sensations. Training in the awareness, and subsequent acceptance, of such interoceptive sensations is a component in the treatment of anxiety disorders such as panic attacks. By using the term here I suggest that God's grace effects subtle bodily sensations to which we can similarly learn to be attentive. Such phenomena, which could be called 'pneumo-somatic', require an awareness of a highly refined, deeply interiorised sense of touch.[48]

When Robert Sardello describes silence as having 'the most subtle qualities of objective touch imaginable', what he is referring to is an interior sense of touch deriving from neural activity and experienced as a subjective state of feeling.[49] Touch gives us an experience not only of the outside world but also of our interiority. We feel the warmth of the sun on our back and the gentle breeze on our face but, if we are attentive, we also feel an increased sense of well-being that can spread throughout the body. This sense of well-being has neurophysiological correlates, for the body is a 'sensory organ'.[50] When John Wesley spoke of his heart being 'strangely warmed', he was not just speaking metaphorically.[51] When the mystics are caught up in ecstatic union, the activities of body and soul are intimately entwined. So, too, attentiveness to the experience of silence reveals data for conscious awareness at a somatic as well as emotional level.

[47] Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, translated by R. S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), 10.6. Emphasis added.
[48] See Meredith Secomb, 'Hearing the Call of God: Toward a Theological Phenomenology of Vocation' (PhD dissertation, Australian Catholic University, 2010), available at http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/digitaltheses/public/adt-acuvp266.24022011, 216 (accessed 10 November 2013).
[49] Sardello, *Silence*, 41.
[50] Sardello, *Silence*, 35. And see H. D. Critchley and others, 'Neural Systems Supporting Interoceptive Awareness', *Nature Neuroscience*, 7/2 (2004), 189–195.
[51] See 'Extracts from John Wesley's Journal: 8th January to 24th May 1738', in John and Charles Wesley, *Selected Prayers, Hymns, Journal Notes, Sermons, Letters and Treatises* (Mahwah: Paulist, 1981), 107.

Such attentiveness, however, is a skill that must be learnt. It demands that we free ourselves from our usual domination by thoughts and images. Sardello observes:

> Sensing our body presence … means we can actually feel our bodily presence in its wholeness as if touched from the outside. To feel so requires us to shift our attention out of our thoughts and perceptions of what is around us to the familiarity and closeness of our own bodily form. For a few moments, as we shift, we do not shut out the world but rather feel it as a spiritual presence touching us. *In those few moments we feel subtly touched all over.*[52]

This refinement of perception requires practice. It may take several years to effect the necessary neurophysiological changes that result in such an intensified level of bodily awareness.[53] The development of this awareness enables silence to become a healing bridge between our contemplative selves and the world; it enables us to resonate with silence.

Resonating with Silence

For Hans Urs von Balthasar, 'The beautiful requires the reaction of the whole man'. Just as a person's whole being is involved in responding to

[52] Sardello, *Silence*, 36. Emphasis added.
[53] Sardello, *Silence*, 40. See Belinda Ivanovski and Gin S. Malhi, 'The Psychological and Neurophysiological Concomitants of Mindfulness Forms of Meditation', *Acta Neuropsychiatrica*, 19/2 (2007), 76–91.

beautiful music or a beautiful work of art, so too the embodied soul responds fully to the beauty of its Creator in so far as it has been trained to do so, becoming 'the "sounding box" of the event of beauty'.[54] I suggest that a similar capacity exists in those who have learnt to be attentive to silence.

Sardello argues that we can learn to 'resonate with Silence'.[55] Just as a sounding bell can cause other objects, such as glassware, to resonate sympathetically, so too the human soul can learn to resonate with silence: 'The human soul functions similarly as an activity of resonance, and our soul connection with Silence is a form of sympathetic resonance'.[56] Sardello encourages us to nurture the felt sense of resonance in order to alert us to the subtleties of silence. In doing so we are brought to an awareness of a 'Holy Silence' where we will find a 'hidden altar' deep within our bodies and our hearts.[57]

As far as this goes, Sardello's reflections on silence are akin to those of the scholars whose work I have discussed so far, both the Eastern Orthodox writers and those in the contemplative tradition of the West. Sardello, however, contributes an important insight. Going on a retreat, visiting a monastery or reading the riches of the contemplative tradition are activities that certainly generate experiences of silence. These are not, however, enduring experiences, for, as Sardello argues, 'it is no longer possible for us to get to Silence in those ways, not in ways that bridge the gap between Silence and the noisy world'.[58] After such experiences we can suffer feelings of alienation, resentment and anger, disorientated for a time by the contrast between the demands of being present to the world and the apparent riches of retreat from the world. Such experiences do not engender a foundational and authentic interiority available for discernment and responsible action.

How then do we authentically 'bridge the gap' between our inward turn and the demands encountered upon our outward return? Only the development of an authentic interiority, helped by awareness of the felt sense of silence in its formation, will enable us to engage authentically with the demands of a needy world.

[54] Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord*, volume 1, 220.
[55] Sardello, *Silence*, 3.
[56] Sardello, *Silence*, 13.
[57] Therese Schroeder-Sheker, 'Introduction', in Sardello, *Silence*, xx.
[58] Sardello, *Silence*, 2.

Attention to Silence: Bridging the Gap

There are certainly personal benefits to experiencing silence:

> We feel a new attunement to spirit as a directly felt reality. We gain the capacity of reflection, of letting the world and things and others mirror within us, rather than ceaselessly going from one activity to the next. We realize that our activity had become an addiction. We gain a newfound creativity. Insights, new ideas, and new ways of seeing come again.[59]

While we may highly value the newly felt interior freedom of the experience of silence, this is not Sardello's emphasis. He wants to bridge the gap between our pursuit of personal solitude and our effective engagement in the world. Hence he wants to integrate both spirit and psyche with the body, for it is an 'embodied spiritual-soul' that comprises the whole person who lives and acts within the world.[60]

For Sardello both psychological and spiritual practices tend to ignore the body.[61] He accepts that these practices acknowledge, and may even value, silence. For them silence is, however, merely a medium for engagement with another object of intentionality. In contrast a focus on silence itself generates an awareness of the bodily experience of silence. As this sensory awareness is heightened, 'the practice of entering Silence itself forms the instrument that gives us access to Silence'.[62] We are no longer thrown into a painful dualism of noise *versus* silence, of activity *versus* stillness. Rather our sensory awareness of bodily presence to silence enables us to transcend the uncomfortable dualisms of engagement with, or withdrawal from, the world:

> Entering Silence through sensing is the key to living both our soul life and our spiritual life in the world …. Letting Silence pervade all we do does work because it never separates itself from the world. Thus we do not make the practice of Silence exclusively into a soul work and go inward, nor exclusively a spiritual work to attain some goal on a spiritual path. The work is to be with Silence itself, and in so doing we are one with soul, spirit, body, and world.[63]

[59] Sardello, *Silence*, 9.
[60] Sardello, *Silence*, 33.
[61] Sardello, *Silence*, 33. He cites psychological practices such as active imagination and dreamwork, and spiritual practices such as meditation and contemplation. He does not consider the mindfulness practices of cognitive behavioural therapies that do focus on the body.
[62] Sardello, *Silence*, 33.
[63] Sardello, *Silence*, 33–34.

Nature provides the primary means to develop an awareness of the impact of silence upon us.[64] Sardello encourages us not simply to enjoy the silence, as on a balmy day we might marvel at the soft and quiet beauty that surrounds us. Rather we are to be attentive to the experience resonating within ourselves:

> We feel the presence of Silence throughout the physical world as a kind of touch …. Our whole body, as a sensory organ in itself, senses this realm. We cannot say we experience Silence just in front of us, or to one side, or above, or in back of us. It is all around and also within.[65]

Such awareness ensures an embodiment, an integration of body, soul and spirit that provides a somatic experience of an 'aloneness that partakes of the whole of the world'.[66]

Once we have discovered this new bodily awareness, then, and only then, can we proceed to enter into silence through meditation.[67]

Eventually we can carry our increased body sensibility into our relationships, giving them a new depth and power.[68] Too early a move into meditation or contemplation carries the danger of being merely the work of a disembodied spirit. Contemplative practices generated from such disembodiment dissociate us from the world and create a division between our 'spiritual' practices and our work in the world. These practices are not authentic expressions of interiority and hence deny us the capacity to engage authentically with others.

An authentic life infuses speech and action with an authority that derives from realms beyond the

[64] Sardello, *Silence*, 9, 35, 38.
[65] Sardello, *Silence*, 35.
[66] Sardello, *Silence*, 36.
[67] Sardello, *Silence*, 38.
[68] Sardello, *Silence*, 47.

surface ego. Such authority comes from the depths of an ego-surrendered self, which touches the reality of God. For, in submitting the ego to a faith-filled silence found in the depths of ourselves, we touch the Word of God which, St John of the Cross informs us, is spoken 'always in eternal silence, and in silence must be heard by the soul'.[69] Here we begin to find the wellsprings of authentic interiority. We enter into the possibility of a faith-filled life of everyday mysticism engaged contemplatively with the world.

An Everyday Mysticism in the World

Brian O'Leary cites the late Cardinal Martini's notion of interiority as 'everything that has to do with the sphere of the heart, of deep intentionality, of decisions made from within'. O'Leary extends this notion to propose an Ignatian 'everyday mysticism', for which, he suggests, interiority is 'an excellent one-word synonym'.[70]

St Ignatius' spiritual life was not just a series of profoundly intimate moments with God such as he experienced at Manresa, for eventually he learnt to find God whenever he wished. His ease in finding God continued to increase as his life progressed.[71] Hence an Ignatian mysticism is, to quote Bernard Lonergan, 'not just a series of exceptional events. It is a whole way of life.'[72] It is, in other words, an 'everyday mysticism'.[73] It was this mystical intimacy with God in the ordinariness of daily life that made Ignatius' ministry so effective.

O'Leary addresses the need for an authentic interiority as a counter-cultural value in the present-day world and, in so doing, reflects on the seemingly paradoxical resonance between Ignatius and the enclosed, silent Carthusians. The active ministry of Ignatian spirituality is in the world for all to see. In contrast the contemplative work of the Carthusians is hidden in the silent solitude of a cell. Yet they have in common an emphasis on interiority:

> The monk lives in his cell in order to cultivate interiority and so find God. Ignatian people carry their 'cell' in their hearts, entering it in

[69] John of the Cross, 'Maxims on Love', 675.
[70] O'Leary, 'Ignatian Mysticism and Contemporary Culture', 54, 55. The expression 'everyday mysticism' is closely associated with Karl Rahner. See *The Spirit in the Church* (New York: Seabury, 1979), 24.
[71] See *Autobiography*, n. 99.
[72] Bernard J. F. Lonergan, 'Bernard Lonergan to Thomas O'Malley', edited by Gordon Rixon, *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies*, 20 (2002), 82.
[73] O'Leary, 'Ignatian Mysticism and Contemporary Culture', 45, 55.

> recollection and prayer. They too cultivate interiority, but in the very different context of being inserted into the world.[74]

The stresses of the world's demands place a great strain on anyone who would unite the contemplative and active lives. The monk's singleness of purpose is more readily sustained in the focused life and rule under which he lives. In contrast, someone seeking to live a life of intimacy with God while at the same time actively serving his or her neighbour is faced with a multitude of challenges. In such circumstances being attentive to the felt sense of silence is a significant aid to maintaining the cell of the heart in ministry in the world.

While we may enjoy the silence of nature or of contemplative prayer, we seldom pay attention to the experience of silence in its impact on our bodies. Silence is real. It touches us. It generates experiences to which we can attend. By paying attention to the felt experience of silence we can learn to resonate with silence and thereby develop a sensitivity its subtleties. Being attentive to the bodily sense of silence helps to ground us, providing a firm bridge between the interior and exterior worlds. When we learn to value the felt sense of silence in every aspect of our lives, we discover that it reveals a new foundation for assured engagement with God and the world. It is a foundation which sustains both our interior solitude and our loving relationship with others.

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[74] O'Leary, 'Ignatian Mysticism and Contemporary Culture', 53.