

**Silence Teaching Hiddenly**  
Lenten Quiet Day  
The King's College Chapel, February 9, 2008  
Directed by Dr Wayne Hankey

When the Lord Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness for forty days and nights, he sought and encountered silence. Those he imitated, those who follow him, and the spiritual tradition generally, discover silence to be the fundamental condition of communication and union with self, others, the vast realms of soul and spirit, and the cosmos. It is our final stance in the face of God. There is nothing more difficult to find at present, and nothing more avoided and feared. The Quiet Day will provide an opportunity to meet Silence, to consider her means, her threats, which our Lord's temptations show to be very terrible, and her fruitfulness. The few hours of the Quiet Day will attempt to open us to the immense fecundity of her hidden teaching.

Matins

Psalm 31 (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 364)

Exodus 19.9, 16-20; 33.17-23.

2 Corinthians 12.1-9

**First Talk: "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46.11): Forms of silence.**

Silence is the most demanding place of truth and grace—this is why we avoid her so determinedly—therefore I must begin by telling you in what respect I am genuinely able to help you here and in what sense not:

1. I know Silence a little,
2. regretfully, I know more *about* silence—quite a different matter, and happily,
3. I have experiences of the silent which may help us both.

Perhaps I can help you most because, despite having more opportunity for silence than most, I am skilled at avoiding her. I hope that at least I can assist you in your own struggles.

Let us start with a reminder that our religious tradition, both in its Jewish and Hellenic aspects, considers silence to be the fundamental condition of communication and union with God. It is the condition of God's revelation: in our Scripture the most characteristic act of God is speaking, he speaks into the void, and we must be quiet and listen. God creates by speaking: "God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light ... and God called the light Day" (*Genesis* 1.3-5). "In the Beginning was the *Word*, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1.1). This creative God, whose very nature is to speak, reveals himself, creates, and recreates, us by speaking: "And God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.'" (*Genesis* 1.26). The speaking God requires listening silence: "He maketh wars to cease in all the world...Be still, then, and know that I am God" (*Psalm* 46.10-11).

The Covenant of Love (the Rule of life of the Sister Adorers of the Precious Blood) has these words on Silence:

Silence is for listening. It is in silence that we can hear the gentle call of the Father, inviting us into the quiet depths of our being. There He speaks His living Word.

What is most basic is also highest. In the mystical tradition, both pagan and Christian, we come at last to Silence. She is the place of union. Thus we get the beginning of the *Mystical Theology* of St Dionysius, the most important text for the formation of Christian (and perhaps also influential in Islamic) mysticism from which the title of this Quiet Day is taken.

TRINITY, who exceeds all Being, Deity, and Goodness! Supremely best Guide of Christians in the wisdom of heaven! Lead us beyond unknowing and light, up to the farthest, highest peak of the mystical divine oracles. There the mysteries of God's word—simple, absolute, and unchangeable—are shrouded in the dazzling darkness of a silence that teaches hiddenly, outshining all brilliance with the intensity of their darkness, and surcharging our blinded intellects with the invisible fairness of glories which exceed all beauty! (*Mystical Theology* 1—as quoted and modified in accord with St Bonaventure *Itinerarium* 7.5).

Silence speaks, Silence teaches; in Silence we are one with our hidden Teacher. We must attend to this more, but at this point I only want to impress upon you that the highest state of religion is also its most basic condition. My chief aim today is to connect these two for you and to show how in this matter “he who is faithful in the least things is also faithful in the greatest.” Put another way, if at the end of today, you will have found help in listening with full attention to a lesson being read, a neighbour speaking to you, a piece of music being sung, and in offering a prayer with your whole heart, you will be well on the way to the Silence which teaches hiddenly.

Silence teaches through her disciples. I present four forms of strong good silence from which we can learn.

#### I. Monastery of the Sister Adorers of the Precious Blood

They have a monastery in Charlottetown—a “monastery” because they are technically “monks,” (*moniales*) on account of their enclosed contemplative life. Their work is reparation—the tough work of the church—which this Order accomplishes by the perpetual adoration of the sacrifice of Christ in his shed Blood. It requires an extraordinary mix: enclosed silent contemplation and prayer in which they unite Christ the Redeemer and the sin and need of humans. This is what they write of their work:

Each one's joys and hopes, sorrows and distresses, especially of the poor, of those who suffer, - they are *our* joys, hopes, sorrows and distresses, and there is nothing of a truly human nature which fails to resound in our hearts. Our whole life is spiritually ‘coloured’ in a special way by our worship of the Precious Blood as it motivates our every gesture. To become an icon of Christ the Redeemer, in our everyday lives, is a great challenge. He gave us all his Blood, let us give Him all our love.

The result is personalities of great dignity, sensitive openness, quiet vulnerability (often literally), and toughness—remember that they bear up to God our sin and need, known in both their particularity and universality and in its inner character: the loss, misery, despair, anger.... They have indeed considered and carried, in order to pass on to the Redeemer, the great weight of sin. The passing is crucial. Because of it, there is also a lightless and joy of spirit. The sisters I met were full of curiosity—I was always being asked theological questions—wisdom and transparent charity.

#### II. Canonesses Hospitalières of St Augustine

When in 1639 the great founder of education for women in Canada, Marie de l'Incarnation, herself a cloistered Ursuline, arrived in Québec, she was accompanied by three cloistered female “monks,” Augustinian Canonesses. These “Hospitalières” de la Miséricorde de Jésus de l'Hôtel Dieu de Québec were the founders of the first hospital in North America (as well as eleven others). The Hôtel Dieu still functions attached to their Monastery. Long fascinated by this kind of union between silent contemplation of enclosed religious and hard service, I visited them last year. Astonishingly, the only usual contact between these cloistered “monks” and the world is in the wards, and other places, of their work. Here also, as with the Sister Adorers of the Precious Blood, I discovered the union of silent contemplation and sacrificial service, bearing the burdens of others. In fact many of the great, most inventive, most skilled

institutions of care for humans in every condition of misery were founded and run by women (and men) who found their superhuman strength in contemplative silence—Mother Theresa of Calcutta gives a contemporary example, although her communities are not as strictly cloistered as were these older orders. Among the “Hospitalières,” I found once again extraordinary personalities, combining humorous contempt for the world and its changing fashions and triviality, with identification with its needy. Utter independence in respect to the world goes with faith and hope. As to the present state of things, their motto is one expressed by Fr Crouse—its all foolishness and cannot last. So, as a philosopher friend of mine said about them, they cannot be defeated because they have confidently identified their work with the will of God. These kind of women are now being appreciated again; see Anne-Marie Sicotte, *Femmes de lumière*.

### III. Doull and Crouse.

“Its all foolishness and cannot last” brings me to my two greatest teachers, Professors James Doull and Robert Crouse, the founders of the intellectual spirituality which distinguishes the Christianity here in the King’s Chapel and Dalhousie Classics. James Doull lived, and Robert Crouse lives, largely in contemplative silence. James Doull was the only person I have known who could sit utterly still in silent thought for hours at a time. He ate austerely, and, unlike Robert Crouse, he had a radio and a very primitive television, so he checked the morning and evening news, but otherwise most of the day consisted in reading, thinking, and some very careful writing, alone and in Silence. When he listened to music or talked to people, it and they received his whole attention—this is a great distinguishing mark of the silent, they have the capacity for attention now so rare.

Robert Crouse has the same pattern but somewhat more radically: he has never had a telephone, or a radio, or a television. He had a stereo but he ceased to use it, making all his own music. Perhaps his most marked trait is to be able to engage in empathic communication where the silences are many times longer than the periods of speech.

The silent contemplations of these two intellectuals enables them to know the things themselves; they have got beyond manipulating the signs, and so, like our cloistered monks, they arrive at quiet stability. Their psyches were not developed in “multi-tasking.” It is remarkable that when I sent a draft of this talk to the Sisters of the Precious Blood on Prince Edward Island, the Superior made these remarks:

You mentioned James Doull, who had that wonderful gift of being totally attentive to whatever he was doing - listening to music, speaking to people, or whatever. That is like the Latin advice, *Age quod agis*, or , “Do what you are doing.” A personal help I find is to start afresh each day - trying to accept it as the gift it is, and being open to whatever God has in store for me during its unfolding hours; challenges, surprises, and so on. Then at night, to leave everything in the Father's strong and caring hands, and start all over again on the following day.

I was very grateful for this affirmation that the spiritual condition which enables real thought also enables prayer.

One of the reasons these two teachers worked and lived in this way was that both of them had their roots in rural Nova Scotia where, until very recently, Lady Silence reigned supreme. I want now to turn to some of her creations there.

### IV. The old Silence and Taciturnity

One of the pleasures of my years caring for parishes by the ocean in Nova Scotia was encountering souls which the old Silence created. To understand that world you may start with Robert Crouse and begin a negation of the forms of contemporary noise: remove telephones, radios, televisions and all their

extensions—interior and exterior. Few had autos more had bicycles or a horse, transportation was more likely by ox cart than by truck; the men mostly fished and cut wood. The older fished from sailing vessels—my grandmother’s first husband and her eldest son drowned before her eyes when their fishing boat was overturned by a squall of wind as they came home from fishing in St Margaret’s Bay—and used horses and handsaws in the woods—the noise of the tractor and chainsaw had yet to cut down sylvan peace. When there was music—and many played something or sang—, it was because they made their own. It was treasured because more rare. Well-shaped word and music in the church were precious. Hideous all-pervasive Musac had not deformed music and rendered it banal, mere background. The consequence, especially in the men, whose lives were often more solitary than those of the women with their families and neighbours (if they were in villages rather than on farms), was inwardness, thoughtful taciturnity, as St Paul advised, they were “slow to speak.” What struck me about this silence was the depth of soul it created, the rock-like independence, responsibility, and reliability, above all the sense of awe before what is. Silence is the most terrible of judges. The frivolity of careless talk is exposed without a word being said, simply because it is really heard. The emptiness of the empty appears. However, to end here with judgment would be wrong. Silence is the medium of love; in it hearts are one beyond speech. I remember with joy old couples, past all the noisy struggles of life, who were one in the silence of heartfelt union.

SUMMARY. Silence: the Highest state of religion and its most basic condition. This listening Silence brings us back to our beginning. Silence is at the summit and is also the most ordinary condition of spiritual life. She was much more the usual human companion than she is now. We need to work harder than our ancestors did to bring her back.

FIRST EXERCISE: Consider someone with a strong beneficent Silence known to you. Think of how they preserve Silence and of her effects on them. Then compare your own state and ask what you can learn. Or start at the other end and consider what keeps you from Silence, what you could do to get closer to her. Then ask God for the gift of attentive Silence and offer a prayer, striving in it for complete attention—use a familiar one so that you do not need to work at getting the words right. Alternatively, or in addition, work through attentively one of the passages set for today’s readings and try to listen to God speaking.

### **Second Talk: “Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness” (Matthew 4.1): Growing Spiritual Senses.**

I suppose that each of you made out differently in your attempt to begin silence. These differences will probably depend on a number of factors:

1. how addicted to and dependent on the distractions, which now most regard both as necessary and ordinary, you are
2. how much of what I call psychological noise troubles you at this moment
3. how used you are to Silence and practiced in welcoming her as your companion
4. how well you understand her ways.

I want to start now with the last of these considerations. One of my aims in my first talk was to get rid of some false oppositions:

1. between solitude and openness to others
2. between contemplation and service
3. between contemplative silence and the reasoning which is our work at the university
4. between silence as the companion of the religious monk separated from society and the psychic space many ordinary people inhabited until very recently.

In this talk I shall begin by trying to get us beyond other oppositions, first between silence and communication, and then between silence and sound. From there we shall consider spiritual sensation.

Sound belongs to silence which by its nature is a form of communication. There are many forms of silence and of silent communications. Consider, for example, forms we should shun: Sullen silence, the cold shoulder, the “I am ‘Not speaking’ to him or her,” which speaks volumes, and which is, in my experience, terribly frightening. Then there is silence as the strongest speech, what we call “Deafening silence.” There is also Numb silence, the silence of a psyche so wounded it cannot move and is locked in its own pain. This terrible silence is often best helped by a voiceless beneficent Silence. Simply being there for the wounded. One deep calls to another.

Once we have recognised that silence communicates, to get any further we must make a distinction between sound and noise, this is essential precisely because sound belongs to silence and if we spend our psychic energy fighting sound, we shall end up in despair and frustration.

Sound as such is not the enemy of Silence. Her enemy I shall call noise. Noise is any motion of body or mind to which we give attention so as to allow it, or make it, distract us. Soundless sights, smells, tastes, pains or pleasures, thoughts and emotions are all possible noises in the sense I mean and I am certain that thoughts, feelings and emotions are much more threats to silence and far more troublesome to conquer than are audible sounds. Inner noise is more a problem than outer noise.

From this distinction between sound and noise, it is absolutely crucial that we draw the conclusion that external facts are not in themselves spiritually decisive. How we embrace or turn from them makes all the difference. Our Lord taught us that it is not what goes into us which defiles but what comes out (Matthew 15.16-20). Among the Hellenes, the Stoics above all developed the spiritual disciplines for the soul’s withdrawal or welcome of what happens to it. Intensified by a higher sense of the soul’s immortal power which she took from the Platonists, the Church developed these disciplines into essentials of the spiritual life. Put most simply we must above all control our attitude to what happens, by that control we literally determine what the events are for us. Let me give you an example, one which has served me a long time, and saved me from much. A dear old friend, a second mother, who suffered a very long chronic illness which prevented her from sleeping well, told me that, provided you do not allow yourself to become fearful or angry because you find yourself awake, provided you relax into it, this sleeplessness is almost as good as sleep. I have found this to be deeply true. The situation is the same for sound and silence.

It is impossible to remove all sound. If all external sound were to disappear, we would still have the sound of our own heart and our breathing—which is why some forms of meditation concentrate on these. In places where mechanical sounds and human voices are quelled or absent, nature is almost overwhelmingly loud—wind, rain, sleet, water moving, animals calling or singing, insects buzzing. At the Grande Chartreuse nature must almost shout—you will experience this if you stay in places remote from the background “white noise,” as it is called, which surrounds us—beginning, I suppose, from when the refrigerator became an almost universal electrical appliance. Once the mechanisms of the psyche which allow us to ignore that “white noise” turn themselves off, nature will begin to explode with sound around us. There is, then, no escape from sound. Moreover, sound can induce silence and help it to give birth.

In his last description of union, the father of the mystical way for pagans and people of the book, Plotinus, wrote as if incantation was part of bringing God to birth in our silent souls:

*Ennead 5.3:* May we stop, content, with thinking? No: my Soul is still in even stronger labour. Perhaps she is now at the point where she must bring forth, having reached the fullness of her birth-pangs in her eager longing for the One. But we must sing another song to her, if we can find one anywhere to allay her pangs. Perhaps in what has already been uttered, there lies the charm if only we tell it over often? No: we need a new, a further, incantation.

The Jesus prayer, as recited in Orthodox Christianity, the rosary, rhythmically recited by adepts in Catholic Christianity, and much of the music in instrument or voice, and some dance, in Islamic and Jewish Sufism bring the practitioners to inner silence, and the still centre around which all else moves. You may well find that such a mantra will help you into silent union. Because I want to break down the wall that usually makes silence a stranger to us now, forgive me when I note that the same mantra which silences the external and internal noise can help induce peaceful sleep.

Having broken down the opposition between silence and sound—in contradistinction from noise., I conclude this talk by bringing us to the spiritual senses in its title. In the last talk we considered the silence necessary to thought which passes from signs to reality, and we took as one of our examples of a silent thinker Fr Robert Crouse. In Scripture, the place where vision, thought, and spiritual imagination bloom is the wilderness. Around the walls of the room where he spends most of his time, Father Crouse has an inscription from Scripture carved. They are words St Bernard took from Isaiah for the habitations of his Cistercian monks and nuns (now called Trappists) who keep silence strictly: “The solitary place shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the lily ... and a highway shall be there and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness” (Isaiah 35.1-9).

One of the features of the thought of Plotinus, taken over by St Augustine and other Christian spiritual guides, was the notion that the soul could develop spiritual senses. It is these above all which grow in the silence of the wilderness.

This idea is found in all Augustine’s major works. This is what he writes about the love of God in *Confessions*, 10.6.8:

What do I love, when I love Thee? not beauty of bodies, nor the fair harmony of time, nor the brightness of the light, so gladsome to our eyes, nor sweet melodies of varied songs, nor the fragrant smell of flowers, and ointments, and spices, not manna and honey, not limbs welcoming the embraces of the flesh. None of these I love, when I love my God; and yet I love a kind of light, and melody, and fragrance, and meat, and a kind of embrace when I love my God, the light, melody, fragrance, meat, embrace of my inner man: where there shines into my soul what space cannot contain, and there is sound what time bears not away, and there are smells what no breeze disperses, and there is a taste for food which no amount of eating can lessen, and where there is a bond of union that no fullness can pull apart. This is it what I love when I love my God.

Bonaventure, in *The Mind’s Road into God*, 4.3. writes of the same:

The soul which believes in, hopes in, and loves Jesus Christ...recovers spiritual hearing to receive the lessons of Christ, vision to look upon the splendor of His light. When, however, he yearns with hope to receive the inspired Word, through desire and affection, he recovers the spiritual sense of smell. When he embraces the incarnate Word in charity, as one receiving from Him delight and passing into Him through ecstatic love, he recovers taste and touch. When these senses are recovered, when he sees his spouse and hears, smells, tastes, and embraces Him, he can sing like the Bride a *Canticle of Canticles*... For it consists more in the experience of the affections than in rational reflections. On this level, when the inner senses are renewed in order to perceive the highest beauty, to hear the highest harmony, smell the highest fragrance, taste the highest delicacy, apprehend the highest delights, the soul is disposed to mental elevation through devotion, wonder, and exultation, in accordance with the *Canticle of Canticles*.

Transforming the exquisite and erotically charged poetry of the *Canticle of Canticles* into the intercourses of the soul with God—including all the terrible pains and intense pleasures of love—was the great work of the Christian mystics. This requires the growth of five new senses, spiritual ones. Their growth is not the work of a day or even a year, but they will grow if tended in the wilderness of silence. We frequently sing as if we possessed them. Consider: “Jesu the very thought of thee with sweetness fills the breast” (EH 419). Let us cultivate them.

SECOND EXERCISE: Find a mantra with which you are comfortable. In my experience the simpler the better, e.g. “Jesus have mercy,” or “Lord have mercy,” “Holy Mary Mother.” Repeat it silently until it shuts out everything distracting, both inside and out, and the interior world opens. Enter it. Alternatively, or in addition, work through a part of Hymn 419, “Jesu the very thought of thee with sweetness fills the breast” or of the *Song of Songs*, sensing the God the poems describe.

<p>Jesu, the very thought of Thee With sweetness fills the breast; But sweeter far Thy face to see, And in Thy presence rest. Nor voice can sing, nor heart can frame, Nor can the memory find A sweeter sound than Thy blest Name, O Saviour of mankind!</p>	<p>O Jesus, light of all below, Thou fount of living fire, Surpassing all the joys we know, And all we can desire.</p>
<p>From <i>Song of Songs</i> 2</p> <p>I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys. As the lily among thorns, So is my love among the daughters.</p> <p>As the apple tree among the trees of the woods, So is my beloved among the sons. I sat down in his shade with great delight, And his fruit was sweet to my taste.</p> <p>The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes Leaping upon the mountains, Skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, he stands behind our wall; He is looking through the windows, Gazing through the lattice.</p>	<p>From <i>Song of Songs</i> 4</p> <p>A garden enclosed Is my sister, my spouse, A spring shut up, A fountain sealed. Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates With pleasant fruits, Fragrant henna with spikenard,</p> <p>Spikenard and saffron, Calamus and cinnamon, With all trees of frankincense, Myrrh and aloes, With all the chief spices— A fountain of gardens, A well of living waters, And streams from Lebanon.</p>

12:15 **Holy Communion:** Lections for Lent One (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 140). Psalm at the Introit and Gradual Ninety-one.

### Third Talk: “To be tempted by the devil” (Matthew 4.1): Wrestling with spiritual powers in high places.

TRINITY, who exceeds all Being, Deity, and Goodness! Supremely best Guide of Christians in the wisdom of heaven! Lead us beyond unknowing and light, up to the farthest, highest peak of the mystical divine oracles. There the mysteries of God’s word —simple, absolute, and unchangeable—are shrouded in the dazzling darkness of a silence that teaches hiddenly, outshining all brilliance with the intensity of their darkness, and surcharging our blinded intellects with the invisible fairness of glories which exceed all beauty! (*Mystical Theology* 1—as quoted and modified in accord with St Bonaventure *Itinerarium* 7.5).

In the first two talks we have been working at the paradox of sounding silence in our union with God. Having considered in this context the growth of our five spiritual senses, it is time to meditate on the loving companion of Lady Silence, the cloud of holy Darkness. Here too we encounter paradox when we speak, as Scripture does, of the darkness surrounding God, the darkness into which we enter when coming to him. Exodus describes the coming of God:

And the LORD said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever. (19.9)... God said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. And the LORD said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.(33.20-23)

Dionysius learned from Exodus, and from Philo, the great Jewish theologian, who brought the Scripture and philosophy together, that:

the mysteries of God’s word —simple, absolute, and unchangeable—are shrouded in the dazzling darkness of a silence that teaches hiddenly. They outshine all brilliance with the intensity of their darkness, and overflow our blinded intellects with the invisible fairness of glories which exceed all beauty!

The Bible insists that both Moses and our Lord Jesus were on the mountain, or in the desert, forty days and forty *nights* and that St Paul was *blinded* by the light which converted him.

Silence and darkness enable sight as well as hearing. More than thirty years ago, before the monuments of Europe were overrun so that Silence and Darkness fled, I visited the church of San Vitale in Ravenna. There, as always, I tried to pray in the church and was able to do so after a group of visitors had left, the coin-operated electric lights had turned themselves off, and the golden gloom from the alabaster windows had returned. When my eyes became used to this dark, and my mind was made attentive by the silence, the holy space filled with moving spiritual beings. All the figures in the sacred icons came to life in the luminous dark. Silent darkness enables us to see as well as to hear. The spiritual senses are connected.

Augustine tells us that reading the life of the hermit St Antony written by St Athanasius was important for his conversion (see *Confessions* 8). You have probably seen paintings illustrating the temptations of Anthony; they provide great opportunity for the imagination because the dark silence of Antony’s desert haunts was filled for him with lurid and terrifying beasts. Athanasius describes one visitation:

The demons, as if breaking through the building’s four walls, and seeming to enter through them, were changed into the forms of beasts and reptiles. The place immediately was filled with the appearances of lions, bears, leopards, bulls, and serpents, asps, scorpions and wolves, and each of them moved in accordance with its form. (Athanasius, *Life of Antony*, 9)

Antony's experience is by no means unique. In the Hellenic descriptions of the realm of soul, scenes like this go back to Homer's *Odyssey* and Circe's island where men are turned into animals. Plato, Plotinus, and Boethius, among many others, understand the threat to the soul's life in terms of our being trapped by the animal passions it contains. Turning to the great mystics, we find they have the same battle as St Paul, whose ministry depended on blinding elevation into the spiritual heavens. He spoke of wrestling:

not with flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (Ephesians 6.12)

However, not only great prophets and mystics encounter the terrible in the silent dark. I certainly have, and I suppose, given the human condition, that, at least at some stage of our lives, each of us, who stays in it long enough to have their inner world manifest itself, will experience something of the same. Nothing is more threatening to us than self-knowledge in the realm of soul. People put up with more or less ceaseless psychological noise, which prevents everything from real work to real communication and love, rather than confront their fears and anxieties, their lusts and desires, their fantasies and ambitions. In our time nothing is more fraudulent than what is called self-knowledge, nonetheless, or perhaps, in consequence, what our cultural industries produce most is ceaseless distraction. No doubt I have lost track, but it seems that at least every month a new machine or new game is invented so that we are never alone, are never introspective or thoughtful, are never in the silent dark with ourselves. We are prevented from sensing what is deeply moving around and within, so that we are never with God where he reveals he can be found.

According to Athanasius, Antony dealt with his attackers by unmasking their natures. Anthony mocked them: "Since the Lord has broken your strength, you attempt to terrify me by the means of the mob; it is a mark of your weakness that you mimic the shapes of irrational beasts." And Athanasius records that "In this circumstance also the Lord did not forget the wrestling of Antony, but came to his aid."

If you would know God, what moves the cosmos, and yourself where they are to be found, you must enter the dark silence and face what you find there. If you do, and if you are rigorously honest, honest enough to expose the weakness, folly, and sometimes mere silliness of your fears, anxieties, lusts, desires, delusions, fantasies and ambitions in the confidence of God's power, goodness, and forgiveness, you will find your way through to a paradise of peace and safety. Oddly, perhaps, your greatest weapon against these forces will be, as it was for Antony, contempt. Robert Crouse often said that we take our sins so seriously we cannot give them up, even by having them forgiven. The great philosopher, spiritual guide, and theologian, Proclus taught that the cause of evil was weakness, that evil had no strength of its own and thus it could only work its harm by being parasitic on good. Dionysius Christianised his teaching. Both guides of the soul Christian and pagan warned against taking evil too seriously and giving strength to its weakness by the force of the very weapons hurled against it. There is no sadder truth than that the forces of a frightened good, whether reactionary or revolutionary, have done much more harm than those who have been self-consciously destructive. Many of our fears, prides, and imagined needs must be mocked; they will shrink in the face of laughter. We must not take ourselves too seriously. Examine them carefully, unmask their force, some of them you may laugh to scorn.

Contemporary self-knowledge is generally fraudulent and ineffective—many of those I know who have spent years, and tens of thousands of dollars or pounds, on what is called analysis, have achieved little more than pride because they have endured the process. In the end it protects the very things which trouble them. They now regard themselves as having a right to take themselves very seriously indeed. No doubt I will be regarded as a Neanderthal for this, but more religion would help where its substitutes fail. The distinguished historian of art and cynic, Kenneth Clarke, got it right when describing the religion of the Catholic Reformation and its acceptance of what the Protestant Reformation suppressed:

Take another human impulse that can be harmonised, but should not be suppressed: the impulse to confess. The historian cannot help observing how the need for confession has returned, even—or especially—in the land of the Pilgrim Fathers. The difference is that instead of confession being followed by a simple comforting rubric which has behind it all the weight of divine authority, the modern confessor must grope his way through the [dark] labyrinth of the psyche, with all its false turnings and dissolving perspectives—a noble aim but a terrifying responsibility. No wonder that psychoanalysts have the highest rate of suicide of any vocation. [I believe they have been replaced in this position by dentists. He concludes] And perhaps, after all, the old procedure had something to recommend it, because, as a rule, it is the act of confession that matters, not the attempted cure. (*Civilization*, chapter 7)

Clarke thus affirms the first epistle of John:

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (I John 1.8-9)

Paul exhorts:

Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. . . . Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit. (Ephesians 6.11-18).

THIRD EXERCISE: Enter silence. Invite one of your fears, follies, anxieties, lusts, desires, delusions, fantasies, or worldly ambitions into your full and frank consciousness, and give it the exposure it deserves. Go armed with gentle self-mockery and the armour of God. Ask Fr Thorne for help, if you feel that you need it. You may want to wait until after the Quiet Day to use his offices.

**Final talk: “Whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof” (Genesis 2. 19): the Immense Fecundity of Silent Speech.**

At the centre of every monastery is a paradise, a garden with a fountain from which four streams, the rivers of the Garden of Eden, flow. The contemplative Silence of the monastery and her disciplines restores us to our original harmony with nature, one another, and the Spirit by which we were created.

The connection between these comes out in this passage from the Covenant of Love of the Sisters of the Precious Blood:

Creating in the monastery an atmosphere of silence and tranquility, of attentive presence to God and respect for our Sisters, calls for personal and communal effort. This is our gift to one another so that in the house of the Lord prayer is always possible. In this way we express love and esteem for our contemplative vocation in the Church.

In the original Paradise, the animals were not enemies of man—as they were for Antony—even though they were discovered to be within Adam, the first and universal human. The creator God, whom Adam imaged, helped Adam find them within himself, when he was alone in the silence of Eden before any human spoke.

Genesis tells us that at first Adam was lonely in Eden. God sets out to give him company. Here is the story:

And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should live alone; I will make him a help, one meet for him. And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he should call them; and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field (Genesis 2.18-20).

Adam is represented here as joining in the making of the living creatures, and as doing so by doing himself what God did “in the Beginning,” that is speaking in the silence. The human creative act by which Adam imitates God is speaking the names of the beasts. In fact, naming the living beings is the first act of human speech, and our first active imitation of God. The first occasion of human speech, this essential action of human beings, occurs when God and Adam cooperate in creating. Only by working together do they create “every living creature.” Put another way, our coming into proper being as humans happens when we help bring the living creatures into formed being. We humans form ourselves, when, by speaking their names, we give each of the living creatures their distinctive identities. To distinguish rightly is to unite, and the beasts thus become parts with us of a harmonic whole. Humans, and the cosmos of living things, come into being mutually and belong together essentially.

God the Creator is represented as being dependent upon Adam in this naming: “God ... brought them unto Adam to see what he should call them; and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.” Because our human being, and the being of the living world, are mutually interlocked, both bodily and spiritually, God must wait on us in this. God waits to see what Adam will call the living creatures, and when the image of God in us comes forth by this act of naming, what Adam does holds for God: “Whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air and to every beast of the field.”

We humans are indeed “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139). Make no mistake, naming is not a superficial activity either for the one who confers the name, or for the one that receives it. The primal naming takes place in the Great Silence which remains the condition of powerful speech and listening. We are sternly forbidden to “take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain” (Exodus 20.7) because God’s power and his holy name are linked.

Naming is creation. By the primal naming we make ourselves and we make ourselves known. For us rational creatures, that is, knowing creatures, these two, making ourselves and making ourselves known, are at root the same activity. Moreover, by the primal naming, the world comes to be and comes to be known. These two, coming to be and being known, are at root the same thing, because the universe is a spiritual reality, its primal existence is as what God speaks in his eternal knowing.

All this is present for a literal reading of this extraordinary text. To explicate it fully is far beyond what we can complete today. The greatest explanation of it was made by one of the most extraordinary minds Christianity produced, John Scottus Eriugena. His unification in the 9<sup>th</sup> century of Greek and Latin theology, of Scripture and philosophy, of God, humanity, and nature, underlies all the greatest efforts Western philosophers and theologians have made to demonstrate that the whole cosmos is theophany, the appearing of God in the dark, his speech in Silence. Eriugena’s greatest book is a Hexaemeron, an exposition of the Biblical story of the creation. The text at which we have been looking is at its center and is key to the rest.

The Nourishing Teacher in Eriugena’s book asks: “Does it seem to you that there is a kind of concept in man of all the sensible and intelligible things the human mind can understand?”

The answer comes back from the well taught Disciple: “This clearly seems to be true: and indeed the essence of man is understood principally to consist in this: that it has been given to him to possess the concept of all things which were either created his equals or which he was instructed to govern. For how could man be given the dominion of things of which he had not the concept? For his dominion over them would go astray if he did not know the things which he was to rule. Holy Scripture gives us a clear indication of this when it says: ‘Therefore, having formed out of the earth every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens, the Lord God brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living soul that is its name.’”

“It says ‘to see,’ that is, to understand what he would call them. For if the man did not rightly understand, how would he be able to call them rightly? But what he called anything that is its name, that is, it is the very notion of the living soul.” (Eriugena, *Periphyseon* IV.6, PL 768D, p. 414).

For Eriugena, humanity can know and name the animals because the human mind is the image of the true Image. The whole visible creation is in the eternal Word. In him is the whole plan, purpose, and counsel of God, the forms and paradigms of the things which God creates by his Son. Because we are images of the Image, what is in God is also in us. Because we are images of the Image, what is in God the eternal creative Word is also in us. This is why we can be co-creators with God.

Eriugena calls humanity “the workshop of all things.” That is our great dignity. However, everything which is wonderful about us is also fearful. Together with our immense dignity, goes the other side: we cannot know ourselves or exist, body or soul, apart from the universe of life. We are as much in these living beings, as they are in us. When, by the true Image imaged in us, we named the beasts, we went out into them. When we destroy that universe of life, we not only destroy the conditions of our bodily life, we also destroy what is essential to our properly human life. We destroy the possibility of self-knowledge. We destroy ourselves body and soul. We darken the image of God in us so that we can see neither the world, nor ourselves, nor God. “If the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness” (Matthew 6.23).

We have seen that the wilderness of Silence can be the Paradisal garden where we grow spiritual senses. We have also found in ourselves a dark wilderness of hostile beasts and reptiles. The work of this Lent, as of every retreat into the wilderness, is to make Silence and Darkness holy places, places of creation and recreation. After Our Lord had struggled against the tempter in the wilderness, the Gospel for today’s Eucharist concludes: “Then the devil leaveth him, and behold, angels came and ministered unto him.” Silence, and heavenly strength can be linked also for us:

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creation. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear and slow to speak (James 1.17-19)

FOURTH EXERCISE: Meditate on this text “God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness’.” Consider what this implies for the depth and dignity of the human spirit if it finds the inner silence in which it can speak creatively.

Evensong  
 Psalm 119. Parts 19-22 (Book of Common Prayer, p. 494)  
 Genesis 2.7-25  
 Revelation 4