

SILENCE: A NEGLECTED VIRTUE FOR CHRISTIAN LEADERS¹



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ABSTRACT

Silence, often overlooked, holds significance for Christian leaders, offering a framework for reflection, ethical growth, and deeper spiritual connection. This paper examines the dimensions of silence as explored by Baldur Kirchner, a Catholic theologian whose work emphasizes silence as an essential practice for self-awareness, ethical decision-making, and attentive listening. Through Kirchner's perspectives, silence emerges as a foundational discipline that enables leaders to engage with others, themselves, and the divine in meaningful ways.

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This paper investigates silence's role in leadership by focusing on its capacity to cultivate inner clarity, relational empathy, and alignment with higher values. Christian leaders, in particular Pentecostal leaders, can benefit from Kirchner's insights on integrating silence into their decision-making processes and their interactions with others. This paper highlights the transformative potential of silence, not only as a personal discipline but also as a key to fostering authentic and value-driven leadership.

Keywords: *silence, Christian leadership, virtue ethics, contemplation, servant leadership*

INTRODUCTION

In a fast-paced world where noise dominates both personal and professional spaces, silence offers an alternative approach for leaders seeking clarity and purpose. Often underestimated, silence provides critical opportunities for reflection, self-awareness, and alignment with core values. For Christian leaders, this practice holds particular relevance as a way to seek divine guidance and foster spiritual depth.

Kirchner describes silence as having three primary dimensions: first, silence in conversations with others, which involves active listening, restraint, and empathetic understanding. This form of silence requires leaders to hold back from interrupting or rushing to speak, creating space for others to express themselves fully. Kirchner views this type of silence as a demonstration of humility and respect, fostering trust and mutual understanding.

Second, Kirchner highlights silence for self-reflection, an inward practice that allows individuals to process inner conflicts, gain clarity on their values and goals, and cultivate personal resilience. This introspective aspect of silence fosters emotional healing and deepens a leader's sense of purpose and identity.

Finally, Kirchner emphasizes silence before God as an essential practice of contemplation and prayer, where the heart opens to divine guidance. This silence is not merely the absence of sound but an intentional act of surrender, allowing for transformation and renewal. Kirchner describes this form of silence as a posture of listening and expectation, comparable to Samuel's words: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening" (1 Sm 3:9).²

By addressing the silence practiced in relationships with others, in self-reflection and before God, this paper underscores the dual nature of silence as both a communicative virtue and a spiritual discipline and a pathway to personal growth.

An essential question arises: why focus on Kirchner rather than the more widely known Anselm Grün? In the German-speaking world, Grün's works on

² Baldur Kirchner, Conversations with the author, Ettenbeuren, April 2016.

spirituality, leadership, and silence have gained significant popularity, with extensive academic analyses available. Grün's contributions have been examined in works such as *Theology and Language of Anselm Grün*,³ making him a familiar figure in theological and popular contexts.

However, Kirchner's approach, though lesser-known, offers unique insights that warrant scholarly attention. His background in psychoanalysis, his integration of monastic traditions, and his application of silence to leadership contexts distinguish his work. Kirchner emphasized that silence is not merely the absence of words but an intentional space for healing, reflection, and transformation—both in conversations and in one's spiritual life, as highlighted in his seminar teachings and theological reflections.

This paper explores the perspectives of Baldur Kirchner, a Catholic theologian, on the role of silence and presents a comprehensive understanding of how silence can shape ethical, personal, and spiritual dimensions of leadership. It contains some autoethnographic elements from the first and main author, Susanne Thyroff. Whenever the first person singular is used, this refers to Susanne. I (Susanne Thyroff) have personally attended some of Kirchner's seminars, including *Seelische Stabilität durch Selbstfürsorge* ("Emotional Stability through Self-Care") in 2016, and have witnessed firsthand how his teachings profoundly impacted me seeking spiritual clarity and resilience. His mentorship was pivotal during a formative phase of my life.

The structure of the paper begins with personal reflections on the experience of silence, followed by a historical overview of silence as a virtue in theological and philosophical thought. It then introduces Baldur Kirchner's biography and key publications to contextualize his thought. Building on this foundation, the core of the paper discusses the three dimensions of silence as defined by Kirchner. Finally, the paper concludes with reflections on the practical implications of silence for Christian leadership, with special reference to Pentecostal contexts.

SUSANNE'S PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH SILENCE

I (Susanne) grew up in a Pentecostal church founded by my father, where worship services were often characterized by passionate prayers, simultaneous worship and characterized by praying in tongues and multiple languages as well as lively expressions of faith. Pentecostal conferences and prayer meetings emphasized spoken prayer as a sign of spiritual blessing, and moments of silence were rare. However, during a personal crisis, I began to appreciate the role of silence in

³ Thomas Philipp – Jörg Schwaratzki – François-Xavier Amherdt (Hrsg.): *Theologie und Sprache bei Anselm Grün*, Freiburg: Herder, 2014.

discerning God's will and processing emotions. My professional background in marketing and communication, which also emphasized verbal expression, initially reinforced this pattern. Yet, guided by Kirchner's theological framework, I discovered silence as a transformative discipline that aids in decision-making, fosters spiritual renewal, and creates space for intentional listening.

The practice of silence helped me to make decisions and find inner healing. During my first exposure to Kirchner's teachings, I attended his seminar titled "Emotional Stability through Self-Care".⁴ This experience marked a turning point as I explored silence as a practice that could bring emotional and spiritual clarity. Kirchner's emphasis on listening to the inner self resonated deeply with me. I was encouraged to focus on the stillness within and allow unresolved emotions to surface. In one significant moment of silent contemplation, I began to address personal questions about my career and theological studies. As I practiced silence consistently, I found myself experiencing a profound sense of peace and certainty about my decisions.

Moreover, the practice of silence became a means of healing past emotional wounds. I recall numerous early mornings spent in silence, reflecting on Kirchner's suggestion to embrace solitude as a space for transformation. Often, these sessions led to emotional breakthroughs—moments of weeping that felt cathartic and restorative. Kirchner's description of silence as a space of healing proved accurate, as I gradually experienced a renewed sense of self-worth and a release from burdens that had weighed heavily on me.⁵ One of Kirchner's pivotal teachings emphasizes that silence can lead to an encounter with God, an immersion into one's self where the divine presence becomes tangible. This idea mirrored my own experiences during contemplation, where the act of listening inwardly opened doors to a deeper spiritual connection. Kirchner asserts that "the Holy Spirit dwells within me",⁶ underscoring the profound spiritual dynamics at play in moments of silence. By integrating this discipline into my daily routine, I not only grew spiritually but also developed the patience and discernment necessary for leadership. As Kirchner argues, listening is a foundational pillar of personal development.⁷

Through Kirchner's teachings and my own journey, I came to understand that silence is not merely an absence of words but a dynamic process of self-discovery, healing, and divine encounter. This practice has profoundly influenced my approach to leadership, equipping me to navigate complexities with greater clarity, empathy, and resilience.

⁴ Baldur Kirchner: *Seelische Stabilität durch Selbstfürsorge* (Seminar, Ettenbeuren, April 2016).

⁵ Baldur Kirchner: *Demut und Stille. Sich selbst neu begreifen*, Kammeltal, Edition Kplus, 2021, 91.

⁶ Susanne Thyroff: Personal conversation during the seminar *Seelische Stabilität durch Selbstfürsorge*, Ettenbeuren, with Baldur Kirchner, April 2016.

⁷ Baldur Kirchner: *Benedikt für Manager. Die geistigen Grundlagen des Führens*, Wiesbaden, Betriebswirtschaftlicher Verlag Dr. Th. Gabler / GWV Fachverlage, 1994, 45.

To transition from these personal reflections, it is important to delve deeper into the broader conceptual framework of silence as a virtue. Understanding how silence aligns with virtue ethics provides a foundation for appreciating its relevance in leadership.

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF SILENCE AS A VIRTUE

In common parlance, silence is often understood as the absence of words or nonverbal communication. However, theological perspectives, particularly those of the Italian-German philosopher and theologian Romano Guardini, define silence as the conscious renunciation of utterance.⁸ It is not merely non-communication, but an intentionally designed space for reflection, connection, and openness towards the other person or the presence of God. This view transcends a utilitarian understanding of silence as a mere tool and recognizes it as a virtue that enriches spiritual and emotional awareness. Guardini emphasizes that silence is not only an external, but also an internal attitude, called recollection, which orients the soul towards God. He describes silence as a form of recollection before God and also as a virtue in interpersonal relationships.

In 2021, the German professor of New Testament, Klaus Berger, published a monograph on Silence.⁹ He describes silence as a central path to divine revelation, leading to an inner peace in which the presence of God can be experienced in a special way. According to Berger, silence is a necessary component of liturgy and mysticism, rooted in biblical witness and the historical tradition of Christian devotion.¹⁰ He sees it as a way and mode of God's revelation and emphasizes that people can become more like God in silence by turning to him silently and thereby sensing his will. According to Berger, silence is also significant when people experience God's silence and understand it in their lives.¹¹

The Church Fathers and mystics have also highlighted the importance of silence: Ignatius of Loyola, in his *Spiritual Exercises*, emphasized the spiritual significance of silence as a means of inner contemplation and communication with God.¹² Teresa of Ávila compared the soul to a castle with various dwellings, where the approach to God takes place in silence, and emphasized that it was important only to be certain that God was there, and not necessarily to speak to him.¹³ John of the Cross, in his works, described the "Dark Night of the Soul"

⁸ Romano Guardini: *Tugenden. Meditationen über Gestalten des sittlichen Lebens*, Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, Mainz, 1987, 164.

⁹ Klaus Berger: *Schweigen. Eine Theologie der Stille*, Freiburg im Breisgau, Verlag Herder, 2021.

¹⁰ Berger: *Schweigen*, 12.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹² Ignatius von Loyola: *Geistliche Übungen*, Regensburg, Echter Verlag GmbH, 2021.

¹³ Teresa von Ávila: *Die Seelenburg*, München, Anaconda Verlag, 2021, 23.

as a profound spiritual experience that can be interpreted in connection with silence.¹⁴ Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk of the 20th century, also addresses the value of silence in his works, connecting his withdrawal into solitude with social and political engagement, and rejecting a complete retreat into silence.¹⁵

In summary, silence as a virtue is much more than the mere absence of words. It is an active, intentional act that leads to self-reflection, to encountering the divine, and to deeper, respectful communication with others. It is a practice that encompasses personal, interpersonal, and spiritual dimensions.

Virtue ethics, unlike normative ethics, does not ask “what is good?” but “who is good?” It focuses on the character of the individual, emphasizing habits cultivated through consistent practice.¹⁶ Classical virtues such as justice, courage, prudence, love, and hope resonate with biblical principles, reflecting God’s nature and inviting believers to emulate these traits. As Halbig¹⁷ observes, virtues are robust character traits, practiced across diverse situations, shaping a person’s moral and spiritual integrity. Silence, however, requires a nuanced understanding; it is not a universal prescription but a practiced discipline that demands discernment.

To understand the significance of virtues in the context of Christian leadership, it is helpful to explore concepts of virtue theory. In his ground-making work *After virtue*, first published in 1981, Alasdair MacIntyre¹⁸ critiques modern ethics and advocates for a return to the Aristotelian tradition. According to MacIntyre, virtues are not mere habits but internalized dispositions that develop through practice. He argues that virtues are character traits that enable individuals to achieve their *telos* (goal or purpose). A community characterized by shared values provides the framework in which individuals learn to act virtuously. This perspective is relevant to Christian leaders whose values and actions are strongly influenced by the community in which they operate. In the Christian context, virtues play a crucial role in the development of character and in living a life according to God’s will.

Leadership, particularly in Christian contexts, extends beyond operational management to embody spiritual guidance. Christian leaders are tasked with stewarding both people and divine purposes, whether in spiritual organizations

¹⁴ Johannes vom Kreuz: *Der geistliche Gesang. Vollständige Neuübertragung der gesammelten Werke Band 3*, hrsg. von Ulrich Dobhan, Ernst Hense und Elisa Peeters, Freiburg im Breisgau, Herder Verlag, 2011.

¹⁵ Corinna Dahlgrün: *Christliche Spiritualität. Formen und Traditionen der Suche nach Gott*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 2009, 9.

¹⁶ Moisés Mayordomo: Möglichkeiten und Grenzen einer neutestamentlich orientierten Tugendethik: Ein programmatischer Entwurf, *Theologische Zeitschrift*, Jahrgang 64, Heft 3 (2008): 216–217.

¹⁷ Christoph Halbig: *Der Begriff der Tugend und die Grenzen der Tugendethik*, Berlin, Suhrkamp, 2013, 19.

¹⁸ Alasdair MacIntyre: *After virtue. A study in moral theory* 3rd edn. Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2008.

or secular enterprises led by Christian leaders. Kirchner's perspective highlights the transformative impact of silence not just on spiritual ministries, but also on leaders operating in secular domains who strive to embody Christian virtues in their professional spheres. Silence, as part of this leadership, enables a leader to listen deeply—to God, to others, and to their own inner convictions. According to Böhlemann and Herbst,¹⁹ spiritual leadership emerges from alignment with the Holy Spirit's guidance. This discipline fosters a grounded and God-centered approach to decision-making, encouraging leaders to serve as instruments of divine will.

Servant leadership, popularized by Robert Greenleaf,²⁰ emphasizes serving others as a pathway to effective leadership. Silence aligns with this model by fostering attentiveness and receptivity—essential qualities for discerning the needs of others and responding with humility and wisdom. Biblical narratives, such as Jesus' moments of solitude, underscore the importance of silence in leadership, portraying it as a means to seek divine strength and clarity.

Silence provides a space for contemplation, described by Kirchner as an inward turning that allows leaders to encounter the divine presence.²¹ This "gaze upon God" fosters spiritual intimacy, enabling leaders to draw strength and wisdom from their relationship with God. Contemplative silence transforms not only the individual but also the communities they serve, encouraging a leadership style rooted in grace and authenticity.

BALDUR KIRCHNER: LIFE AND WORK

His life

Baldur Kirchner, born on November 17, 1939, in Komotau (present-day Chomutov, Czech Republic), had a childhood profoundly shaped by his upbringing in a Jesuit-run orphanage. This environment influenced his later reflections on silence as both a potential source of harm and a tool for profound healing. In *Benedikt für Manager* he observed, that silence, when misused, can become "punishment" or "psychological torture."²²

Kirchner's life was shaped by his 1962 escape from East Germany. Kirchner pursued advanced studies in philosophy, Catholic theology, classical philology,

¹⁹ Peter Böhlemann – Michael Herbst: *Geistlich leiten*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011, 22.

²⁰ Robert K. Greenleaf: *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*, New York, Paulist Press, 2002.

²¹ Baldur Kirchner: *Der kontemplative Weg. Begegnungen mit der persönlichen Innenwelt*, Kammetal, Edition Kplus, 2008.

²² Kirchner: *Benedikt für Manager*, 119.

and Slavic literature at the universities of East Berlin and Tübingen. His doctoral thesis examined the worldview of Ivan Bunin through his prose.²³

In the 1970s, he was trained in psychoanalysis under Balthasar Staehelin, a formative experience that shaped his understanding of silence as a process of self-revelation and healing.

His theological journey was enriched by regular visits to the Benedictine Abbey of Neresheim, starting in 1975, where he engaged deeply with the Rule of St. Benedict. These experiences inspired his seminal work *Benedikt für Manager*, in which he applied monastic principles to contemporary leadership contexts.²⁴

In his later years, Kirchner focused on the practical applications of silence in leadership and personal well-being. His book *Demut und Stille*²⁵ highlighted the transformative power of humility and silence in fostering wisdom, ethical clarity, and resilience.

Until his death on April 17, 2023, in Kammeltal, Kirchner remained intellectually and spiritually active, leaving a legacy that frames silence as a profound tool for spiritual growth, personal healing, and ethical leadership.

Kirchner's key publications

Baldur Kirchner's publications are central to understanding his perspective on silence, leadership, and personal development. His works bridge theological, philosophical, and practical insights, often drawing from monastic traditions and applying them to contemporary contexts. Unfortunately, not many of his German books were translated into other languages. This section outlines some of his key publications, highlighting their main themes and relevance to the topic of silence:

*Benedikt für Manager. Die geistigen Grundlagen des Führens*²⁶ (in English: *Benedict for leaders. The spiritual foundations of leadership*): This foundational work explores the spiritual principles of leadership by drawing parallels between monastic life, particularly the Rule of St. Benedict, and the corporate world. Kirchner presents silence as a key virtue for leaders, emphasizing its role in cultivating inner wisdom and ethical clarity. He highlights the connection between silence and humility.

Kirchner sees this book as a guide for managers to integrate Christian principles into their leadership practices. He argues that the Benedictine

²³ Baldur Kirchner: „Die Lebensanschauung Ivan Aleksejevic Bunins nach seinem Prosawerk,“ PhD diss., Universität Tübingen, 1968.

²⁴ Kirchner: *Benedikt für Manager*, 9–11.

²⁵ Kirchner: *Demut und Stille*.

²⁶ Kirchner: *Benedikt für Manager*.

tradition offers a solid foundation for leadership. He also defines a virtue as the ethical constitution of a person.²⁷

He connects the ability to listen with ethical competence. He posits that leaders can only effectively lead people they know, and they can only get to know them through listening.

*Dialektik und Ethik. Prinzipien des Führens und Vertrauens*²⁸ (in English: *Dialectics and ethics. Principles of leadership and trust*): This book delves into the relationship between communication, ethics, and leadership. Kirchner discusses the importance of dialogue and dialectical thinking in fostering trust and ethical decision-making. He also describes communication culture as a result of personal development. He believes the way one interacts with others is a reflection of one's personality. He argues that the personal values of an individual strongly influence their actions. Kirchner stresses that the ability to engage in a scholastic debate reflects the moral competence of a leader and argues that convincing others, as opposed to persuading them, occurs when a person communicates from their center.

*Der kontemplative Weg. Begegnungen mit der persönlichen Innenwelt*²⁹ (in English: *The contemplative path. Encounters with the personal inner world*): In this work, Kirchner focuses on contemplation as a means of personal growth and spiritual development. He offers a guide to exploring one's inner world and finding deeper meaning and connection with the divine. He views the book as a guide for people who have a sense of spiritual homelessness, and who are searching.

Kirchner argues that truly spiritual guidance opens the door to a seeker's essential depth and does not glorify techniques or the person leading them. Also, he describes how a person who practices contemplation can discover the capacity to be alone. He discusses how inner silence emerges only when unresolved conflicts are addressed and emphasizes that healing for the sick soul can be found within. Kirchner argues that listening to one's inner world is a vital prerequisite for being able to listen to others.

*Demut und Stille. Sich selbst neu begreifen*³⁰ (in English: *Humility and silence. Understanding yourself anew*): Kirchner's later work highlights the transformative power of humility and silence, arguing that these virtues are crucial for achieving wisdom, ethical clarity, and resilience. He believes that the humility of a spiritual teacher is demonstrated by seeing their leadership as service, viewing themselves as a channel, and not pursuing their own personal interests.

²⁷ Kirchner: *Benedikt für Manager*, 89.

²⁸ Baldur Kirchner: *Dialektik und Ethik. Prinzipien des Führens und Vertrauens*, Kammeltal, Edition Kplus, 2006.

²⁹ Kirchner: *Der kontemplative Weg*.

³⁰ Kirchner: *Demut und Stille*.

DIMENSIONS OF SILENCE ACCORDING TO KIRCHNER

Kirchner's understanding of silence spans three interrelated dimensions: self-reflection, communication with others, and communion with God. These dimensions, grounded in his Catholic theological background, offer a comprehensive framework for leadership development. A Pentecostal reflection is provided to explore the alignment and potential tensions with Pentecostal practices.

Silence for Self-Reflection

Kirchner identifies silence as a virtue reflecting a mature personality.³¹ Silence begins where words end, existing even before speech.³² This recalls the Gospel of John's depiction of God's eternal silence preceding the Word. For Kirchner, silence is a conscious, voluntary refraining from speaking, enabling leaders to resist self-promotion.³³

Silence fosters self-discovery and personal clarity while also deepening relational connections by sharpening awareness of nonverbal cues.³⁴ However, used as punishment or as neglect, silence can harm relationships and create emotional distress. It is also a tool for decision-making, as it facilitates reflection on what to express or withhold. Engaging with silence in the context of death allows individuals to transcend life's noise and confront existential fears.³⁵

Building on Staehelin, Kirchner relates silence to two realities: the finite physical and the infinite spiritual. Personal growth involves recognizing the integration of these realities. Primal fear ("Urangst") hinders relational capacity, while primal trust ("Urvertrauen") fosters empathy, hope, and resilience. Leaders with primal trust inspire confidence and provide encouragement.³⁶

Kirchner emphasizes silence's role in self-reflection and personal transformation. He highlights the importance of processing external feedback to achieve self-knowledge, where silence provides a space for emotional clarity and healing.³⁷ Individuals lacking inner centeredness often exhibit restlessness, which can be remedied by silent introspection.³⁸

Kirchner concludes that meaningful communication arises from personal depth cultivated through silence. He references monastic figures whose solitary reflection prepared them for impactful service, illustrating that silence not

³¹ Kirchner, *Benedikt für Manager*, 115.

³² Ibid., 117.

³³ Ibid., 115–116.

³⁴ Ibid., 118–119.

³⁵ Ibid., 120–121.

³⁶ Ibid., 17, 23–24.

³⁷ Kirchner: *Dialektik und Ethik*, 96–99.

³⁸ Ibid., 115.

only facilitates communication but also embodies the essence of personal growth.³⁹

In Pentecostal theology, self-reflection primarily occurs through the active engagement with the Bible and prayer. While practices like contemplation are less emphasized, the process of personal transformation is central to Pentecostal spirituality. The concept of being a “temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 6:19) is foundational, with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit understood to begin at conversion.⁴⁰ This contrasts with Kirchner’s view that the divine already resides within every individual from birth.⁴¹

In Pentecostal theology, self-reflection typically occurs through Bible reading and loud prayer, rather than extended periods of silence or contemplation. The distinction between “logos” (the written Word) and “rhema” (the Spirit-revealed Word) is a frequently discussed concept in Pentecostalism. The process of reflection often involves meditating on Scripture until a passage becomes “rhema,” a specific, Spirit-inspired message for the believer.⁴²

Unlike Kirchner’s view that the divine is inherent in all people and accessible through inner stillness, Pentecostals teach that self-reflection is guided by the Holy Spirit, who indwells believers upon salvation.⁴³ Inner peace and self-awareness are seen as the result of the Spirit’s transformative work, not solely through silence.

Silence in Communication with Others

Kirchner emphasizes that communication reflects an individual’s personal development, manifesting in their lifestyle and behavior toward others. The quality of interpersonal dialogue reveals the ethical principles of the participants. An ethically oriented communicator will act in accordance with their conscience, communicate honestly, and foster relationships that are personal rather than merely functional.⁴⁴

Dialogue competence, according to Kirchner, is an essential social skill. It involves the ability to actively listen, which demonstrates respect and appreciation for the other person. Failure to listen, on the other hand, stems from egocentrism, where the listener is preoccupied with their own thoughts rather than fully engaging with the speaker’s message. This often leads to incomplete understanding and diminishes the value of the relationship.⁴⁵

³⁹ Kirchner: *Der kontemplative Weg*, 7.

⁴⁰ Stanley M. Horton: *Der Heilige Geist*, ICI-University, Asslar-Berghausen, 2008, 19.

⁴¹ Kirchner: *Der kontemplative Weg*, 35.

⁴² Mark Virkler: *How to Hear God’s Voice*, Shippensburg, Destiny Image Publishers, 2006.

⁴³ Horton: *Der Heilige Geist*, 19.

⁴⁴ Kirchner: *Dialektik und Ethik*, 12–13.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 149.

Impatience, expressed through interrupting, is another sign of poor listening, undermining the speaker's contribution. Such behavior may be rooted in fear or insecurity, such as the fear of losing an argument. Superficial listening, driven by these anxieties, results in dominance rather than connection. True engagement requires setting aside one's own agenda and making space for the other person's concerns. Kirchner links the ability to listen attentively with the capacity to love, as both require overcoming self-centeredness and releasing personal needs.⁴⁶

In Pentecostalism, communication with others is rooted in spiritual discernment and Scripture-based guidance. While silence is not directly emphasized as a method for interpersonal connection, the Holy Spirit's work in believers fosters qualities like patience, humility, and love, which are essential for healthy relationships (Gal 5:22–23).

The Pentecostal emphasis on the Spirit's role in guiding interactions resonates with Kirchner's view that self-awareness and listening are key to meaningful dialogue.⁴⁷ However, Pentecostal practice does not prioritize silence in communication but focuses on active engagement through Spirit-led interactions.

Silence in Communication with God

Kirchner describes contemplation as a pathway to exploring one's inner life, enabling individuals to process past experiences and realign their values.⁴⁸ In this inner space of silence, free from external and internal distractions, a person can encounter the divine. This place is characterized by stillness, where even thoughts are quieted, creating room for God's voice to be heard.⁴⁹

Contemplative practice, according to Kirchner, requires a dedicated and consistent approach. He recommends setting aside a specific, quiet space for contemplation. During this time, patience, discipline, and a readiness to face unresolved inner conflicts are essential. Inner silence emerges when individuals confront and resolve troubling issues rather than suppressing them, opening themselves to God's transformative presence.⁵⁰

Kirchner emphasizes that contemplation should not be approached with an expectation of emotional highs or specific outcomes. Instead, it involves surrender and letting go of worldly attachments, enabling a deeper encounter with God. This process, which he likens to a conscious dying to self, cultivates

⁴⁶ Ibid., 149–150.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 149.

⁴⁸ Kirchner: *Der kontemplative Weg*, 10.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 36.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 40.

spiritual openness and a profound sense of trust.⁵¹ Over time, contemplative prayer moves beyond structured techniques, leading to a wordless, intuitive awareness of God's presence.⁵²

Drawing on Matthew 6:7–8, Kirchner highlights the importance of retreating into a “quiet room” for prayer. In such stillness, believers can rest in attentive worship before God, relinquishing personal agendas and allowing his guidance to shape their thoughts and actions. This posture of surrender fosters a deep sense of peace and unconditional acceptance, affirming God's love and presence.⁵³

Contemplation also serves as a source of spiritual guidance and decision-making. In silence, individuals often find clarity about life's purpose and receive divine direction for important decisions. Kirchner notes that this process strengthens the connection between conscience and personal identity, ensuring that actions are aligned with deeply held values.⁵⁴

Regular contemplation leads to profound inner healing and transformation. Kirchner describes it as “a transformation of the personality by the divine will,” allowing unresolved pain and conflicts to surface and be addressed.⁵⁵ This renewal fosters qualities such as patience, humility, and freedom from ego-driven desires, drawing believers closer to God.⁵⁶

At its peak, contemplation facilitates the unification of the soul with God. Kirchner highlights this experience as a momentary yet profound encounter with divine unity, transcending human limitations and offering a glimpse of eternal harmony.⁵⁷

The Pentecostal approach to hearing God emphasizes Scripture (“logos”) and Spirit-led revelation (“rhema”). Believers are taught that God's voice is most clearly heard through the Bible, often illuminated by the Holy Spirit in moments of prayer or reflection.⁵⁸ While moments of quietness can provide an environment for hearing God, Pentecostal teaching stresses that silence alone is insufficient without prior engagement with God's Word.

This contrasts with Kirchner's emphasis on silence as a primary means of encountering God. In Pentecostal theology, silence complements active practices like Bible study and prayer, where the Holy Spirit brings Scripture to mind (Jn 14:26). The idea of listening for God in silence is acknowledged but not a central practice.

⁵¹ Ibid., 48.

⁵² Ibid., 53–54.

⁵³ Ibid., 71–73.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 65–67.

⁵⁵ Kirchner: *Der kontemplative Weg*, 58.

⁵⁶ Kirchner: *Demut und Stille*, 108.

⁵⁷ Kirchner: *Der kontemplative Weg*, 78.

⁵⁸ Virkler: *How to Hear God's Voice*.

Key Differences between Pentecostal and Kirchner’s perspective

Aspect	Pentecostal Perspective	Kirchner’s Perspective
Self-Reflection	Guided by Scripture and the Holy Spirit.	Achieved through silence and inner contemplation.
Communication with Others	Spirit-led interactions emphasizing humility and love (Gal 5:22–23).	Requires listening and self-awareness developed in silence.
Communication with God	Centered on Scripture (“logos”) and Spirit-revealed insights (“rhema”).	Silence is a primary method for hearing God’s voice.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

This exploration of silence as a neglected virtue for Christian leadership reveals its transformative potential in three key dimensions: self-reflection, communication with others, and communion with God. Baldur Kirchner’s insights, deeply rooted in Catholic theology and enriched by psychoanalytical and mystical traditions, provide a compelling framework for understanding the multifaceted role of silence in leadership contexts.

Kirchner expands the traditional Pentecostal understanding of silence, which is often confined to “quiet time” before God, by framing it as a comprehensive virtue that shapes relationships with oneself, others, and the divine. His perspective encourages leaders to embrace silence not merely as a private spiritual discipline but as an ethical practice that fosters humility, empathy, and intentional listening.

Silence as Self-Reflection

Kirchner identifies silence as a tool for self-discovery and transformation. By creating intentional spaces for introspection, leaders can confront unresolved inner conflicts and realign their values with their calling. This aligns with Pentecostal teachings on the transformative work of the Holy Spirit but differs in its emphasis on contemplative practices. Pentecostal leaders might benefit from integrating such practices into their spiritual disciplines, as they offer a pathway to deeper clarity and resilience.

Silence in Communication with Others

Effective leadership, according to Kirchner, relies on the ability to listen deeply—a skill that begins with silence. This perspective complements the

Pentecostal focus on Spirit-led interactions by underscoring the relational and ethical dimensions of listening. Leaders who practice silence in their interactions can build trust, foster mutual understanding, and cultivate a culture of respect within their teams and communities.

Silence in Communion with God

Kirchner's view of silence as a gateway to encountering God resonates with Pentecostal theology, particularly in its emphasis on discerning the voice of the Holy Spirit. However, his approach diverges by positioning silence as a primary means of divine communion, whereas Pentecostal practices prioritize engagement with Scripture ("logos") and Spirit-revealed insights ("rhema"). Both traditions, however, recognize the value of silence in creating space for divine guidance.

Relevance for Christian Leadership

This study highlights the potential for Christian leaders to adopt silence as a complementary practice to their existing spiritual disciplines. While Kirchner's approach may challenge traditional Pentecostal norms, it offers valuable tools for fostering personal growth, enhancing interpersonal communication, and deepening spiritual connection.

Kirchner's assertion that silence alone can lead to divine encounter, even for non-Christians, warrants critical engagement from a Pentecostal perspective. While such experiences may occur, Pentecostal theology emphasizes the centrality of Scripture and proclamation in leading individuals to a transformative relationship with Christ. Silence, therefore, might serve as a preparatory practice that opens individuals to the Gospel message.

Practical Implications

Integrating silence into Christian leadership training could have profound implications. Contemplative retreats, workshops on active listening, and structured times of quiet reflection could help leaders develop greater spiritual and emotional depth. By embracing silence as a discipline, Christian leaders can cultivate a leadership style that is both grounded in humility and attuned to the needs of their communities.

Final Thoughts

Silence is more than the absence of words; it is a dynamic space for reflection, relational connection, and spiritual renewal. By viewing Kirchner's insights through a Pentecostal lens, Christian leaders can rediscover silence as a powerful tool for ethical clarity, authentic communication, and divine encounter. This integration has the potential to transform not only individual leaders but also the communities they serve, making silence a foundational virtue for leadership in the modern age.

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