



The Dual Power of Silence: Revering God and Rejecting Idols in Habakkuk and Gregory of Nyssa

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the dual role of silence as reverence for the divine and rejection of idolatry in the Book of Habakkuk and the works of Gregory of Nyssa. Through qualitative textual analysis and comparative study, it explores how these figures, separated by centuries and traditions, converge in their understanding of silence as a response to divine mystery. The research reveals that both Habakkuk and Gregory view silence as an acknowledgment of human limitations in comprehending the divine and as a safeguard against idolatry. Their insights remain relevant in addressing contemporary spiritual challenges, offering a counterpoint to modern tendencies of excessive verbalization and intellectual control in religious practice. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of silence in Judeo-Christian thought and its potential applications in contemporary spirituality.

Keywords: Silence; Divine mystery; Habakkuk; Gregory of Nyssa; Apophatic theology; Idolatry; Contemplation; Spirituality

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INTRODUCTION

While silence has been a central aspect of both Jewish and Christian spiritual practices, its dual role as reverence for the divine and rejection of idolatry remains understudied, particularly in comparative analyses across traditions and historical periods. In both Judaism and Christianity, silence is a profound spiritual practice that transcends the absence of sound, becoming a gateway to divine mystery. While the Jewish tradition roots silence in reverence for an ineffable God and as a rejection of idolatry, Christian contemplative practices see silence as a path to spiritual transformation (Carr-Chellman & Kroth, 2017, p. 31). Both traditions, though distinct in their expressions, share a deep respect for silence as a form of worship, reflection, and resistance to human attempts at controlling or reducing the divine.

In Jewish theology, silence is a meaningful engagement with God, particularly in moments of judgment, powerlessness, or martyrdom. For example, the prophetic writings of Jeremiah, Amos, and Isaiah show how silence often follows devastation, symbolizing the ultimate defeat of nations and individuals. Psalm 115 and Habakkuk contrast the lifeless idols, which cannot speak, with the vocal and active presence of Yahweh, whose worship is marked by sound, song, and celebration (MacCulloch, 2013, p. 13). This theological framework finds its roots in

the Hebrew Scriptures, where silence before God acknowledges the limits of human understanding and the danger of representing "the part for the whole" (Dorff, 2013, p. 122). This concept of silence as both worship and anti-idolatry finds powerful expression in the Book of Habakkuk, yet its full implications have not been thoroughly explored in current scholarship.

The intertestamental period further enriches our understanding of silence in Jewish tradition. During this time, silence takes on a powerful symbolic role in Jewish martyrdom. The silence of Eleazar and the seven brothers in 2 Maccabees 6:18–7:42 during their torture reflects unwavering trust in God's justice and an ultimate refusal to betray the laws of Moses. Their silence, rather than signifying defeat, embodies strength as they face death with quiet defiance, confident in divine justice beyond their suffering (Jordaan, 2018, p. 7). This silence functions as a testament to the deep spiritual resolve that characterizes Jewish martyrdom.

Maimonides, a preeminent Jewish philosopher and theologian of the 12th century, lived thousands of years after the Hebrew Bible had been formed. His contributions came during the Medieval period, a time of flourishing intellectual exchange between Jewish, Christian, and Islamic scholars. In his interpretation of Psalm 65:2, Maimonides viewed the verse 'To You, silence is praise' as an affirmation that silence is the highest form of worship, a direct consequence of his apophatic theology. For Maimonides, since God's essence is beyond human comprehension and cannot be positively described, silence, rather than speech, becomes the ultimate expression of reverence toward the ineffable God (Yang, 2022, p. 103). This understanding reflects his belief that God's true nature must be approached through negation.

In Christian tradition, silence also holds deep spiritual significance, with early monastics such as the Desert Fathers and Mothers laying the foundation for its practice. These ascetic figures, including Anthony of Egypt and Arsenius the Great, retreated into the deserts in the 4th and 5th centuries, seeking solitude and silence as a way to encounter God more deeply. They cultivated both external and internal silence, aiming to quiet the mind and resist worldly distractions, creating space for divine encounter. Their teachings on silence, preserved in texts like the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, continue to inspire spiritual seekers today, offering a counter-cultural perspective on communication and spirituality in an increasingly noisy world (Reilly Bluma, 2016, p. 2).

Later Christian mystics, such as Thomas Merton, drew from this rich tradition, seeing silence as essential for cultivating attentiveness to God's presence. For Merton and others in the contemplative tradition, silence became more than the absence of noise it was a sacramental practice that opened a path to spiritual growth, healing, and compassion. In this way, the Christian tradition expanded the meaning of silence beyond reverence for the ineffable, making it a core practice for spiritual transformation and divine encounter (Chase, 2016, p. 7). Gregory of Nyssa's apophatic theology represents a sophisticated development of silence as a theological principle, but its relationship to earlier Jewish concepts of silence and idolatry remains underexamined.

Both traditions reflect the dual power of silence: it honors the mystery of God and stands as a rejection of human attempts to confine or manipulate the sacred. Whether through the silent martyrdom of Jewish figures or the contemplative stillness of Christian mystics, silence remains a sacred practice that opens a path to encounter God's presence beyond the limits of language and human understanding.

While separated by centuries and differing in their contexts, the prophet Habakkuk and Gregory of Nyssa both engage deeply with the theme of silence as a response to divine mystery and idolatry. Habakkuk, from within the Jewish prophetic tradition, confronts physical idolatry condemning the worship of lifeless statues and false gods. In contrast, Gregory of Nyssa, a key figure in early Christian theology, takes the battle against idolatry into the

intellectual realm, viewing the human mind's attempt to define or contain God through finite concepts as a form of idolatry.

This article addresses a significant gap in current research by exploring several key questions. It examines how silence functions as both reverence and rejection of idolatry in Habakkuk and Gregory of Nyssa's works, seeking to uncover the insights that a comparative analysis of these two figures can offer for understanding the role of silence in spiritual practice. Furthermore, it investigates how this dual understanding of silence can inform contemporary approaches to faith and worship.

The thesis of this article is that in both the Book of Habakkuk and the writings of Gregory of Nyssa, silence functions dually as an act of reverent worship toward an incomprehensible God and as a deliberate rejection of the human tendency toward idolatry, which attempts to control and limit the divine. By examining these two figures from different traditions and historical periods, this study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of silence in spiritual practice, contributing to both theological scholarship and contemporary religious discourse. This comparative approach not only illuminates the enduring significance of silence across traditions but also offers fresh perspectives on its application in addressing modern spiritual challenges.

RESEARCH METHOD

This article employs a literature study method, specifically utilizing a qualitative textual analysis approach to explore the theme of silence in both the Book of Habakkuk and the writings of Gregory of Nyssa. This method allows for a nuanced examination of complex theological concepts across different historical and cultural contexts. The study involves a close reading of relevant biblical and theological texts to demonstrate how silence functions as both an act of reverence for God and a rejection of idolatry. The research process begins with textual selection and preliminary reading, identifying key passages in Habakkuk and relevant works of Gregory of Nyssa that address silence and apophatic theology.

The analysis then delves into an in-depth examination of Habakkuk, focusing on the key passage of Habakkuk 2:18-20. This analysis explores how Habakkuk's treatment of silence reflects broader theological themes within the Hebrew Scriptures, such as trust in divine sovereignty and the limits of human understanding. The prophetic call to silence before God is considered in relation to idolatry, emphasizing the powerlessness of false gods and the active presence of Yahweh.

The study then turns to the works of Gregory of Nyssa, analyzing his reflections on silence and apophatic theology. Gregory's critique of human attempts to define or confine God is explored through his theological writings, emphasizing how silence operates as the highest form of worship and a rejection of intellectual idolatry. This examination highlights Gregory's development of apophatic theology, where the acknowledgment of God's incomprehensibility leads to a form of silence that transcends language and concepts.

Following these individual analyses, a comparative approach is employed to identify similarities and differences in how silence functions in these two contexts. This comparison reveals the dynamic interplay between the prophetic tradition and early Christian theology, offering a richer understanding of silence's dual role in spiritual life.

Throughout the analysis, interpretations are contextualized within the historical and cultural settings of the texts, and connections are drawn to broader theological frameworks. The hermeneutical approach employed in this study combines historical-grammatical interpretation with a sensitivity to the theological and philosophical contexts

of the texts. This involves considering the original languages, historical context, and the broader theological traditions within which these texts are situated.

While this qualitative approach does not yield quantifiable results, it provides rich, contextual insights into the complex theological concepts under examination, revealing nuances that might be missed in a more quantitative approach. This methodology allows for a deep exploration of how silence functions as both reverence for the divine and rejection of idolatry in Judeo-Christian thought, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of this spiritual practice across different traditions and time periods.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of silence in Habakkuk and Gregory of Nyssa's works reveals significant parallels despite their different contexts. Both sources present silence as a form of reverence for divine mystery and a rejection of idolatry. The following table summarizes the key findings:

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Silence in Habakkuk and Gregory of Nyssa

Aspect	Habakkuk	Gregory of Nyssa
Primary Function	Response to divine sovereignty	Theological method
Relation to Idolatry	Contrast to powerless idols	Rejection of intellectual idolatry
Expression of Faith	Trust despite lack of visible signs	Embrace of divine incomprehensibility
Spiritual Journey	From questioning to acceptance	Continuous ascent (epektasis)
Theological Context	Prophetic tradition	Apophatic theology

These findings highlight the dual role of silence as reverence for the divine and rejection of idolatry in both traditions. The convergence of these perspectives, spanning different time periods and traditions, suggests an enduring importance of silence in spiritual practice and theological reflection. This raises intriguing questions about the universal nature of silence in spiritual experiences and its potential applications in contemporary religious contexts.

Silence and Idolatry in the Book of Habakkuk

In the Book of Habakkuk, the concept of silence plays a central role in the prophet's journey from questioning God's justice to accepting divine sovereignty (Anderson, 2011, p. 68). The narrative unfolds as Habakkuk struggles with God's apparent silence in the face of injustice and evil. As he grapples with his inability to understand why God remains silent while the wicked prosper, the prophet eventually arrives at the conclusion that human silence is a necessary response to divine mystery. This silence is not one of passive resignation but of active trust and worship, an acknowledgment of God's incomprehensible nature and rejection of idolatry (Hab 2:18-19)

Habakkuk's journey begins with a deep sense of frustration. He questions why God remains silent and seemingly indifferent to the suffering of His people. "How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, 'Violence!' but you do not save?" (Hab 1:2). The situation that prompted such a cry, ironically, did not come from outside but from within Judah itself. The phrase "destruction and violence" frequently appears in the prophetic writings of the Old Testament as a critique of social injustices within the covenant community

(Snyman, 2020, p. 40). This plea encapsulates the human response to divine silence a yearning for answers and intervention, a desire for control over an uncertain future.

This plea encapsulates the human response to divine silence a yearning for answers and intervention, a desire for control over an uncertain future. Yet, as the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that Habakkuk's experience of God's silence is not a sign of abandonment, but rather an invitation to a deeper trust in God's sovereign plan. This plan defies human understanding, highlighting the limitations of human knowledge and perception (Snyman, 2020, p. 51).

The silence that Habakkuk ultimately advocates is not a passive acceptance but a profound act of worship. In Habakkuk 2:20, the prophet proclaims, "But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him." This silence represents an attitude of reverence and an acknowledgment of God's incomprehensibility (Bruce, 2018, p. 876). It is a recognition that human words and actions are insufficient to grasp or influence the divine. Silence becomes, in this sense, an act of humility a rejection of humanity's futile attempts to control or comprehend God's plan. Far from being indifferent or passive, this silence is an active expression of reverence and trust in the face of divine mystery.

In the context of Habakkuk's message, silence also functions as a rejection of idolatry. Idolatry, as depicted in the book, represents humanity's attempt to control fate in response to the uncertainty of divine silence. The idols that people turn to in their desperation are lifeless, powerless objects created by human hands in an effort to manipulate the forces of the universe. Habakkuk 2:18-19 mocks these efforts, asking, "Of what value is an idol carved by a craftsman, or an image that teaches lies? For the one who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak." Here, the inability of idols to speak contrasts sharply with the living God, whose silence is not a sign of impotence, but of sovereign control and wisdom beyond human comprehension.

The critique of idolatry in Habakkuk goes beyond a theological disagreement, positioning it within a broader condemnation of unjust and oppressive practices. Silence, in this context, functions as an affirmation of God's transcendence and a rejection of the human impulse to reduce the divine to something comprehensible or controllable.

The Second Commandment prohibits physical representations of God, safeguarding His freedom and transcendence. Similarly, silence rejects the need for audible manifestations of the divine, as language ultimately breaks down when attempting to describe the ineffable (Bayer, 2020, p. 129). Both the prohibition of images and the embrace of silence acknowledge that God's true nature is superessential and beyond human senses, definition, or understanding, while paradoxically affirming His promised presence through His name.

Habakkuk presents silence as a multi-faceted response to the divine. On one hand, it is an act of worship toward an incomprehensible God, and on the other, it is a deliberate rejection of idolatry. This silence is not passive; it is a form of trust that speaks volumes, expressing reverence, humility, and expectation all at once. The prophet's journey from questioning to trusting culminates in his declaration of faith in Habakkuk 3:17-19, where he proclaims, "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines... yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior." This trusting silence is a powerful expression of faith in the face of uncertainty a declaration that even in the absence of visible signs of God's favor, one must trust in His sovereign plan (Handaric, 2021, p. 76).

The trusting silence advocated in Habakkuk can also be seen as a fulfillment of the Second Commandment's call to avoid graven images. The commandment not only prohibits physical idols but also warns against the human

tendency to try to encapsulate or control the divine through tangible means. Silence aligns with this commandment by preserving God's transcendence, rejecting the need for sensory representations of the divine, and honoring God's invisibility. It recognizes that human attempts to control or comprehend God, whether through idols or words, are inherently futile and can lead to misrepresentations of God's true nature. In this way, silence protects against the presumption of fully grasping or defining the divine, acknowledging that any human attempt to do so would be inherently idolatrous (Jonker, 2013, p. 67).

Habakkuk's message of silence as a rejection of idolatry is particularly poignant in its critique of humanity's desire for control. Idolatry, as depicted in the book, is not merely the worship of physical objects but represents a deeper impulse to manipulate or control the divine (Vandrunen, 2004, p. 141). The idols are symbols of human attempts to create a sense of security in a world where God's actions often seem inscrutable. Yet, as Habakkuk reminds his audience, these idols are ultimately powerless. They cannot speak or act; they are the products of human hands, and trusting in them is a futile exercise. In contrast, the righteous are called to live by faith, trusting in God's sovereignty even when His actions are not immediately understandable (Kim, 2020, p. 230). "But the righteous person will live by his faithfulness" (Hab 2:4). This faith is not dependent on visible signs or human understanding but rests on a deep trust in God's character and plan.

Throughout the Book of Habakkuk, the prophet's journey from questioning to trusting reflects a transformation through silence. In the beginning, Habakkuk is troubled by God's silence in the face of injustice, but by the end, he embraces silence as a response to divine sovereignty. His final declaration, "The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights" (Hab 3:19), reflects the profound shift that has taken place. No longer seeking to control or understand God's plan, Habakkuk rests in the knowledge that God's ways are higher than human ways and that silence before Him is both an act of worship and a rejection of the human desire for control (Handaric, 2021, p. 65).

In conclusion, Habakkuk's treatment of silence presents it as a powerful response to the divine mystery and a rejection of idolatry. Silence, in this context, is not an absence of communication but a profound expression of trust, humility, and reverence. It acknowledges the limitations of human understanding and rejects the futile attempts to control or represent the divine through idols or words. By embracing silence, Habakkuk affirms God's sovereignty and transcendent nature, calling all people to trust in His incomprehensible plan.

Gregory of Nyssa: Apophatic Theology and Divine Silence

Gregory of Nyssa, a 4th-century theologian and one of the most influential Church Fathers, played a central role in the development of Christian thought, particularly in his exploration of divine incomprehensibility and the mystical experience of God (Nyssa, 1993, p. 97). His ideas represent an evolution of the Judeo-Christian tradition's approach to the divine, specifically in addressing the profound mystery of God's nature and the limitations of human understanding (Conway-Jones, 2020, p. 15). Although Gregory's thought is influenced by Neoplatonism, a philosophical system that emphasizes the transcendent and ineffable nature of the One (or God), it still echoes some of the central concerns found in Hebrew scripture, such as the question posed in the Book of Habakkuk regarding how humanity should approach an unknowable God.

In Habakkuk, the prophet grapples with God's elusiveness and hiddenness, suggesting that humans should respond to this mystery with reverent silence. Gregory of Nyssa explores similar themes in *The Life of Moses*, focusing on the figure of Moses an important Hebrew leader whose own encounter with the divine culminates in

the mystical ascent into the darkness of God's incomprehensibility (Nyssa, 1978, p. 95). Gregory draws on Neoplatonic ideas by outlining a threefold spiritual journey: purgation, illumination, and unification that leads the soul from cognitive understanding to an encounter with the unknowable God. This ascent reflects both the Hellenistic tradition and the reverent, humble approach seen in Hebrew scriptures, where the divine is hidden and can only be approached in awe and silence (Eubank, 2014, p. 26).

Gregory builds upon the foundational concept of reverent silence, expanding it into a profound philosophical and theological framework. He moves beyond mere reverence to address the deeper question of how human beings can approach or comprehend God's infinite essence. His work represents a pivotal development in Christian thought, where divine mystery is no longer just an acknowledgment of human limitations but becomes the very basis for a comprehensive theological method. This method is grounded in the recognition that God's ineffability is not a barrier, but rather the core of spiritual and intellectual ascent, continually leading the soul towards the infinite and unknowable divine. Gregory's concept of *epektasis*, the soul's eternal movement into God's infinite being exemplifies this dynamic, where divine infinity becomes the key to understanding the soul's unceasing journey into God's mystery (Conway-Jones, 2018, p. 274).

In Gregory's approach, known as apophatic theology, or the "way of negation," any attempt to describe God through positive language is inherently flawed because human concepts and language are finite, whereas God is infinite and beyond all conceptualization (Karfíková et al., 2007, p. 77). This idea is rooted in the principle that God is utterly transcendent, making Him radically "other" and inaccessible to the human mind in a comprehensive way. Thus, Gregory insists that the only valid approach to understanding God is through negation by denying what God is not, rather than affirming what God is. This approach allows for a deeper engagement with the divine, as it strips away any human constructs that may distort or limit the reality of God's nature (Steenbuch, 2018, p. 162).

One of the most significant aspects of Gregory's apophatic theology is his insistence that God's essence is fundamentally unknowable to human beings. Gregory does not completely deny that humans can have some knowledge of God; however, he stresses that such knowledge is always incomplete and mediated by finite human faculties (Gornandt, 2023, p. 327). What we know of God is only a shadow of the full reality. According to Gregory, our finite minds can never grasp the infinite and transcendent nature of God, who lies beyond all categories of human understanding. Therefore, any attempt to describe God with positive affirmations will inevitably fall short. Gregory argues that even when we speak of God, we are, in a sense, creating idols of thought—mental constructs that constrain the divine to human conceptual boundaries (Sandwell, 2019, p. 113). The use of negation in Gregory's theology offers a way to avoid this intellectual idolatry (Sandwell, 2019, p. 120). By focusing on what God is not, rather than attempting to affirm what God is, the believer approaches a more authentic understanding of the divine mystery, freeing God from human limitations.

Gregory extends this critique to human language itself, arguing that it is inadequate for conveying the full reality of God. He emphasizes that while language is a powerful tool for describing finite things, it fails when applied to the infinite. Human language is bound to the material world and the categories of human experience, making it inherently limited in scope. Gregory believes that whenever humans attempt to speak about God, they risk reducing God to something comprehensible, and in doing so, they distort the divine essence. Thus, silence becomes not merely a response to the mystery of God but a theological imperative, a recognition that the best way to approach the divine is through the abandonment of language and conceptual thought altogether (Conway-Jones, 2020, p. 2).

Silence, in Gregory's theology, is not purely negative or passive. Instead, he redefines it as a form of active contemplation. Apophatic silence allows the soul to transcend human limitations and encounter the divine directly. This type of silence is dynamic, fostering a deeper engagement with the divine rather than an empty void of thought. Gregory insists that by embracing this kind of silence, the soul can move beyond the limitations of human understanding and encounter God in His mystery. For Gregory, this silence represents a form of learned ignorance an awareness that true knowledge of God consists in recognizing the limits of human knowledge (Petcu, 2014, p. 572).

Gregory of Nyssa also introduces the concept of *epektasis*, or the soul's eternal progress toward God (Nyssa, 2012, p. 171). This idea represents a significant departure from traditional Christian notions of a final, static state of union with God. Gregory envisions the spiritual journey as one of continuous growth, with the soul forever advancing toward an ever-deepening knowledge of God. However, because God is infinite, the soul can never reach a point of complete knowledge (Ramelli, 2019, p. 51). Instead, the journey toward God is an endless ascent, driven by the soul's desire to know the divine. This concept transforms silence into an essential component of the soul's progress. As the soul draws closer to God, it must continually abandon its previous conceptions and enter into deeper silence, acknowledging that each new revelation of God is incomplete and must be surpassed in turn. Gregory's theology, therefore, places silence and contemplation at the center of the spiritual life, as they allow the soul to transcend its limitations and move closer to the divine.

The implications of Gregory's apophatic theology for Christian worship and spirituality are profound. By emphasizing the unknowability of God, Gregory introduces a mystical dimension to Christian faith. His theology invites believers to move beyond intellectual knowledge of God and toward a more experiential understanding of the divine (Thomas, 2022, p. 540). This approach emphasizes direct, personal encounters with God through silence and contemplation, rather than through dogmatic formulations or doctrinal certainty. Gregory's apophatic theology thus fosters a sense of humility in the believer, as it acknowledges the limitations of human reason and the ultimate mystery of God's nature. In doing so, it shifts the focus of Christian worship from intellectual comprehension to a more profound engagement with the divine mystery. This theological framework also provides a foundation for contemplative practices that prioritize silence and stillness as the means of approaching God (Upson-Saia, 2019, p. 102).

In conclusion, Gregory of Nyssa's apophatic theology marks a significant development in Christian thought, particularly in its treatment of divine incomprehensibility and the role of silence in the spiritual life. By framing silence as both a response to God's ineffability and a theological method for engaging with the divine, Gregory opens up new possibilities for understanding the relationship between God and humanity (Steenbuch, 2016, p. 576). His concept of *epektasis* further transforms this dynamic, suggesting that the soul's journey toward God is an endless process of growth and transformation (Steenbuch, 2016, p. 577). In Gregory's theology, silence and contemplation are not mere acts of reverence but integral to the soul's continuous ascent toward the divine. His apophatic theology offers a vision of the spiritual life that is grounded in humility, wonder, and an ever-deepening encounter with the mystery of God.

Convergence of Habakkuk and Gregory of Nyssa's Thoughts: The Centrality of Silence

The convergence between Habakkuk's prophetic wisdom and Gregory of Nyssa's theological insights is most clearly articulated in their shared emphasis on silence. Both figures approach silence not as mere absence of

speech, but as a profound response to the divine mystery, where language fails and humility begins. For both Habakkuk and Gregory, silence serves as a fundamental recognition of the limits of human understanding when confronted with the infinite nature of God. This theme of divine incomprehensibility is central to their thought: Habakkuk, who moves from questioning God's justice to an acceptance marked by reverent silence, and Gregory, who contends that God's essence transcends all human concepts, advocating silence as the ultimate act of humility.

In Habakkuk 2:20, the prophet declares, "The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth be silent before Him." This call to silence is not simply about stillness; it represents an acknowledgment of God's sovereignty and an understanding that human words are insufficient in the presence of the divine. Similarly, Gregory of Nyssa, through his apophatic theology, stresses that God's essence cannot be grasped through human language or thought. For Gregory, to attempt to define God is to risk idolatry a form of intellectual idolatry where human constructs distort the reality of the divine. Silence, therefore, emerges as the only fitting response, a surrender to the ineffable nature of God that honors His transcendence.

This understanding of silence as a safeguard against idolatry is another significant convergence between the two thinkers. In Habakkuk 2:18-19, the prophet condemns the worship of idols, which are depicted as "speechless" and powerless in comparison to the living God (Legaspi, 2017, p. 464). This critique highlights the futility of idols and the human tendency to seek control over the divine through false representations. Gregory extends this critique by addressing not just physical idols but also the conceptual idols formed in the mind. His apophatic approach insists that silence protects against the dangerous reduction of God to finite human categories (Mannen, 2023, p. 52). Both Habakkuk and Gregory, therefore, see silence as an act of resistance to idolatry, preserving the mystery and freedom of the divine from human limitation.

Yet, for both, silence is far from passive. It is, in fact, transformative. Habakkuk's journey from questioning to faith is marked by silent contemplation. This silence can be seen as part of a broader reflection on Israel's collective trauma, where the prophet's own experience mirrors the suffering of his people and their search for meaning amidst oppression (Kim, 2020, p. 222). Through silence, he shifts from a place of despair, questioning God's apparent inaction, to one of deep trust in divine providence, even when God's plans remain inscrutable. This transformation culminates in Habakkuk 3:17-19, where the prophet proclaims his faith despite the absence of visible signs of God's intervention, declaring, "Though the fig tree does not bud... yet I will rejoice in the Lord" (Bakon, 2011, p. 30). Gregory of Nyssa similarly emphasizes the transformative power of silence through his concept of *epektasis*, where the soul continuously ascends toward the infinite mystery of God. For Gregory, silence facilitates this eternal journey, allowing the soul to engage with God beyond the limitations of knowledge and language.

In both thinkers, silence is also closely linked to faith. In Habakkuk 2:4, the prophet asserts that "the righteous will live by faith," a faith ultimately expressed in trusting silence. Gregory, too, advocates for a faith that embraces the unknown, where apophatic silence becomes the deepest form of communion with God. For both Habakkuk and Gregory, silence represents not the absence of communication, but a profound form of communication that transcends words, enabling a deeper trust in God amidst uncertainty. It is in this silence that faith reaches its fullest expression, where the believer, in humility and reverence, acknowledges the limitations of human comprehension and the sovereignty of the divine.

In sum, the convergence of Habakkuk and Gregory of Nyssa's thoughts on silence offers a profound insight into the spiritual life. Silence, for both figures, is not just a momentary response to the divine but a comprehensive spiritual approach that acknowledges the mystery of God, rejects idolatry, and facilitates personal transformation.

This shared emphasis on silence challenges both ancient and modern tendencies towards excessive verbalization and intellectual control in religious practice, reminding us that sometimes the most meaningful encounter with the divine is found not in what we say or think, but in the quiet space where we listen.

Contemporary Relevance and Application of Silence in Divine Mystery

The insights from Habakkuk and Gregory of Nyssa on silence as a response to divine mystery remain profoundly relevant in the modern world. As we navigate an age of constant noise, information overload, and an overwhelming saturation of images, their emphasis on silence offers a countercultural approach to spirituality. Silence, as both thinkers suggest, becomes a powerful tool for spiritual growth, contemplation, and deeper engagement with the divine. Today, this ancient practice speaks directly to several pressing contemporary challenges.

First, in an era characterized by unprecedented access to information, silence offers a crucial space for depth and reflection. Karl Rahner's theological reflections on silence, as explored by Agolia, highlight how silence is not simply the absence of sound but an encounter with divine mystery. Rahner emphasizes that silence can serve as a sacrament of God's nearness, drawing individuals into deeper faith, hope, and love (Agolia, 2019, p. 223). In a culture saturated with noise and superficial content, silence invites a more profound engagement with the complexities of faith.

Additionally, the proliferation of images and visual stimuli in contemporary life often leads to a devaluation of what is unseen and ineffable. Silence, as experienced in contemplative practices or even during visits to sacred spaces like churches, provides a reminder of the mystery that cannot be captured through imagery. Kauppinen-Räisänen et al. found that silence in sacred spaces, such as churches, is perceived as a "precious moment," offering an empowering experience for individuals seeking respite from the visual overload of modern life. This notion suggests that silence can be a counterbalance to the constant bombardment of images, allowing individuals to reconnect with the unseen and transcendental aspects of spirituality (Kauppinen-Räisänen et al., 2019, p. 38).

Moreover, in a world increasingly marked by ideological polarization, silence offers a means of holding beliefs with humility and resisting the urge to reduce complex truths into rigid concepts. Silence, as argued by Mannen, guards against the idolatry of ideas, reminding us that God and divine mystery cannot be fully encapsulated by human language or concepts. This apophatic approach, which calls for an acknowledgment of the limitations of human understanding, fosters a more open and dynamic faith, making space for the unknown (Mannen, 2023, p. 52).

Finally, in the face of spiritual consumerism where religious experiences are often commodified and treated as quick fixes silence offers a path of patient and transformative engagement with the divine. The wilderness solo experience, studied by Naor and Mayselless, demonstrates how silence, particularly when experienced in nature, allows individuals to slow down and contemplate the sacredness and meaning of life. Their research highlights how silence in the wilderness enables individuals to disengage from the pressures of consumer culture and fosters a deep sense of personal growth and spiritual discovery (Naor & Mayselless, 2020, p. 9).

In conclusion, the practice of silence, as articulated by both ancient and contemporary thinkers, remains a powerful tool for addressing the challenges of modern life. In a world overwhelmed by noise, information, and imagery, silence offers a sanctuary for reflection, humility, and genuine spiritual engagement.

CONCLUSION

This article demonstrates the profound significance of silence as both a form of reverence for the divine and a rejection of idolatry in both the Jewish and Christian traditions. The analysis fulfills the study's objective of exploring how silence functions dually in Habakkuk and Gregory of Nyssa's works, revealing a striking convergence despite their temporal and cultural differences. The examination of Habakkuk reveals silence as an act of trust and worship, responding to God's mystery and sovereignty in the face of injustice. In contrast, Gregory of Nyssa's apophatic theology presents silence as a pathway to encountering the infinite nature of God, where language and human concepts fall short. Both figures, though separated by time and tradition, emphasize that silence transcends human attempts to control or define the divine, positioning it as a sacred response to divine incomprehensibility.

The findings confirm our initial hypothesis that silence serves a dual role in both traditions, highlighting its enduring theological significance. This dual role remains relevant today, especially in a world increasingly overwhelmed by noise, superficiality, and information overload. Silence invites a deeper spiritual engagement, allowing individuals to confront the ineffable and foster a more profound connection to the divine beyond words or images.

By synthesizing these arguments, we conclude that silence serves as a powerful tool for resisting idolatry, promoting spiritual growth, and cultivating trust in the divine. This understanding offers valuable insights for contemporary religious practice and theology. Future research could explore several promising directions:

1. Investigating how these ancient practices of silence can be adapted and implemented in modern spiritual practices across different religious traditions.
2. Examining the psychological and neurological effects of contemplative silence in religious contexts.
3. Analyzing the role of silence in interfaith dialogue and its potential for fostering mutual understanding between different religious traditions.

These avenues of inquiry could further elucidate the universal aspects of silence in spiritual experience and its potential applications in addressing contemporary religious and social challenges.

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