

*How Beautiful You are My Love:
Becoming Icons of Blessed Silence in Our Time*

Robyn Fitzgerald



And I have heard God's silence like the sun.

Franz White, God's Silence, 75

How beautiful you are my love

How beautiful you are.

Song of Songs 4:1

This reflection is an invitation into beholding *The Icon of Blessed Silence*.ⁱ It was given to me by a dear friend many years ago, though it is only recently that it has drawn me into its gaze. The icon comes to me at a time of change in my life, most precious of all, becoming a grandmother. It has held me through the tragic events of Nepal, to which I have deep connection. Lately, it has been resounding in my heart amidst daily images of lives and places disfigured by war, displacement, violence and ecological devastation. *Recalling* the icon returns me to the refuge of Silence that tenderly unknows old patterns of separating thinking that create so much suffering in me and in our world. *Remaining* in the icon, Silence feeds me with little pearl drops of Wisdom that shine with faint illuminations of unknowing. No longer a refuge from the world, Silence becomes my centre, and boundaries that keep me outside her communion dissolve. *Reposing*, the blessedness of Silence flows, drawing me deeper into herself. Here, there is only One Living Silence.

Here, Silence feeds my heart. She lures me to see more clearly. How I love you dearest Blessed Silence, my heart murmurs. How beautiful you are.

Known as *Christ, Saviour of Blessed Silence* (Спас Благое Молчание), this icon, portraying Christ as a youthful, winged, angelic figure, first appeared in Russian iconography around the late fifteenth century. Unlike more familiar icons of Christ that portray an event from his earthly life, *The Icon of Blessed Silence* is a rare image that was preserved within Russia's "Old Believer Communities" (from 1650's onwards). The earliest surviving Russian example is in a fresco in the Dormition Cathedral of the Moscow Kremlin, c 1482.ⁱⁱ

The Icon evokes Isaiah's "Angel of Great Counsel" (*Megalēs Boulēs Angelos*) (Isa 9:6 LXX)ⁱⁱⁱ. Thus, Christ's depiction as an *angel* is not as a created angelic being, but as the pre-incarnate eternal Logos, the divine messenger who bears within himself the hidden counsel and peace of God. Over time, as people have prayed with the icon in the tradition, the Angel of the Great Counsel becomes Sophia Logos, the eternal Wisdom in whom the potential of all creation is already held in God. Delicately, the revelation of *The Icon of Blessed Silence* becomes Sophianic. Divine Wisdom, through which God's eternal life, beauty and meaning are expressed in creation, reveals herself to be embodied and clothed in Blessed Silence. Kerrie Hide's poetry evokes the Sophianic field silently giving birth to the Divine Logos Word:

Father in Logos
Logos in Father
Spirit breathing the communion
humanity indwelling Christ-Logos
Christ-Logos indwelling humanity
with Sophia the oneing-Wisdom-radiance
of the whole indwelling mystery
awakening and revealing.^{iv}



The Logos Word, spoken eternally in Blessed Silence, thus becomes a revelation of Wisdom eternally hidden in God. This revelation becomes clearer when we consider two better-known images that emerged in Russia at the same time as *The Icon of Blessed Silence*: the Novgorod tradition of *Sophia, the Wisdom of God*, shown in a fresco of 1441, depicting Sophia as a fiery, winged figure (above); and Andrei Rublev's *Trinity* (also known as *The Hospitality of Abraham*), c. 1420s, in which the three angelic visitors of Abraham are contemplated as an icon of Trinitarian communion (below). When read alongside *The Icon of Blessed Silence*, these icons open a profoundly Sophianic world in which the Divine Wisdom Sophia is made visible through the beauty of Blessed Silence. Exquisitely, the hospitality of the Trinity that is made explicit in Rublev's icon is implicitly and so quietly held in *The Icon of Blessed Silence*.



Thus, in both name and form, *The Icon of Blessed Silence* invites us into contemplation of the ever-present Silence of the Trinity, the communion of Divine Wisdom unfolding within our world and expressed in the Logos Christ, “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:24), through whom all things come to be.

With this same sense of ongoing revelation, when we enter into the icon and it becomes a window into the sacred, the eternal Christ reveals the Christ-self as the Wisdom of Blessed Silence, or Christ consciousness. The icon thus offers us deep wisdom and clarity for *this evolutionary moment*. As a species, we have forgotten who we are. Yet, at the heart of the icon breathes the person of Christ continually recalling us to our original memory of the Wisdom Logos beholding us from within the life of the

Trinity. Importantly, the hospitality of the persons of the Trinity offers a vision, not just of relationship between us, but of who we are in God. Made in the image and goodness of God, we can see that we have the inbuilt capacity to coincide in daily life as beings-in-one-another, undisturbed. In our deepest heart, we are icons of Blessed Silence giving birth to Wisdom today, embodying the hidden counsel of God.

Before we turn to contemplate the icon itself, I will highlight two brief insights from the tradition of iconography that may be helpful for our beholding *The Icon of Silence*.

Firstly, Beauty is ontological, the very ground of being.^v For Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, whose theology of symbols influenced Russian theologies of iconography, all life is “created according to the eternal model, the Archetype of Beauty”.^{vi} The Russian theologian Paul Evdokimov describes the revelation that unfolds when we awaken to this archetypal presence: “the beautiful meets us and we know it intimately; it comes close to us and begins to mold itself in the very likeness of our being”.^{vii} Therefore, as we enter into the beholding of *The Icon of Blessed Silence*, we are invited to actively begin in the Beauty Evdokimov names as pre-eternal: the beauty that precedes us, grounds and calls us. We are to notice any part that feels separate from Beauty, drawing this part into the beholding with gentleness, listening as the Beloved whispers, “how beautiful you are, my love.” (Sg 4.1)

Secondly, as our beholding settles into the beauty-filled gaze of Christ releasing us from subject–object awareness, beholding becomes participation in the creative life of God. As we behold the Face of Beauty it becomes, in the words of Bernard of Clairvaux, “not the recipient but the giver of form”.^{viii} Beauty is not only something we see, but something we are *given to incarnate and bring forth* in the world. Every thought, every intention, every action is potentially an act of creative beauty. As Rilke writes, our beholding “ripens things”.^{ix} Our beholding is not separate from the world. It participates in its creation, ripening even the most hurting places in our world.



I invite you now to become comfortable and awaken in the beholding of *The Icon of Blessed Silence*.

As you begin this meditation, behold the icon as a whole, without distinguishing its many features. Notice how beholding all of the icon, *at once*, takes us beyond the conceptual mind into an unbounded place that places the whole icon in the quiet centre of our heart. Sense into the quality of unifying light in you: how it settles all that may feel disturbed in you, moves towards you, into you, into the world, desiring self-sharing. Then allow your gaze to be drawn to the many different features of Christ.

Below, I touch briefly on four illuminating features.

First, at the forefront of the icon, we see that Christ's hands hold nothing—no book, no scroll, no staff, no orb. At the same time, his hands are shaped like a chalice, the cup of holding and pouring, as if holding and pouring out nothingness from within. In this eternal self-emptying posture, something always new is being revealed. Christ's hands are also held in a gesture of blessing, drawing attention to the source of the most exquisite, golden, luminous light of nothingness. Here the Sacred Heart is Blessed Silence. Blessed Silence is the Sacred Heart. The heart that remembers, understands, is broken, chooses, desires, and loves, becomes the true organ for perceiving Silence and reveals the presence of the One we love. Further, Robert Sardello describes how, once awakened in the heart, Silence spreads throughout the body.^x Likewise, in this icon, Silence serenely and radiantly suffuses Christ's whole body, infusing his clothing, revealing the blessedness of Eternal Silence. All creation becomes a theophany.

Second, we notice how Christ's golden gown is embossed with precious stones and pearls. In the biblical imagination, precious stones belong to the radiance of the New Creation of Christ Consciousness revealed in his transfigured beauty, "as a bride all dressed for her husband ... in every kind of jewel" (Rev 21:2). As we reflect Christ the bridegroom, we wear the jewels and pearls of our lives for our Beloved spouse Christ. Critically, this bridal vision does not exclude the reality of our lives and of the world we live in. Gertrude of Helfta evokes how the suffering of trauma, the agony of physical pain and the grief of her life *become* exquisite jewels that Christ treasures. In the theophany of creation, our beholding never leaves our own life or the world behind.^{xi}

Next, as we have already explored, are the great, golden, feathered wings of Christ evoking the Angel of Great Counsel, Wisdom. As we open our hearts into the pre-eternal Blessed Silence drawing us beyond time and sound into the eternal Silence from which the Word comes forth, a supreme tranquillity and utter stillness is magnified by the power and potential of such mighty wings. Here both stillness and movement coincide. Silence is inviolable stillness and Silence moves in the human heart in the midst of world conflict, as we enter the Still Silence that flows inside all things.

Lastly, Christ's serene face is surrounded by an eight-pointed halo or nimbus that opens our beholding into the profoundly Trinitarian mystery that this icon has held silently all along. Notice that the nimbus bears the ancient Greek name, *The One Who Is* (Ὁ ὢΝ). Blessed silence speaks from Silence without ever leaving the Silence yet fully alive in our human nature. Our deepest identity, our *is-ness* of being in one another is held eternally in *The One Who Is*, who is Blessed Silence.

In conclusion, the Russian word "blessed", *blagoe* is rooted in the ancient Slavic word for goodness that is given, gifted. When we, the Contemplative Evolution Network gather at 4.00 pm each day, we create a spaciousness to behold the Angel of Great Counsel becoming the Wisdom of God, giving and gifting life. In the Blessed Silence of our hearts, we become icons of Blessed Silence in our world today.



ⁱ The image is reproduced according to the publication: *Sophia Wisdom of God. Exhibition of Russian icon painting of the XIII-XIX centuries from the collections of Russian museums*: [Catalogue]. Moscow: Radunitsa, 2000.

ⁱⁱ “Благое Молчание” [“Blessed Silence”], *Православная энциклопедия* [Orthodox Encyclopedia], vol. 5 (Moscow: Church Research Centre “Orthodox Encyclopedia,” 2002), pp. 317–318.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Angel of Great Counsel is a title inherited from the Septuagint, the Greek Scriptures that profoundly shaped the theology, worship and iconography of the Eastern Church.

^{iv} Kerrie Hide, “Sophianic Awakening”, *Mystic Heart: In the Centre of Nothingness: Apophatic Prayer and the Awakening of the Apophatic Self. Spiritual Direction Formation Programme for Spiritual Directors and Contemplatives*, 23-24th July 2026

^v Paul Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, Kindle, loc 74

^{vi} Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchies*, III, 7.

^{vii} Evdokimov, Kindle, Loc 217

^{viii} Bernard of Clairvaux, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, 31.6

^{ix} Rainer Maria Rilke, “The hour is striking so close above me” in *Book of Hours: Love Poems to God*, translated by Joanna Macy

^x Robert Sardello, *Silence: The Mystery of Wholeness*, 12.

^{xi} Gertrude of Helfta, *The Herald of God’s Loving Kindness*, 3.2