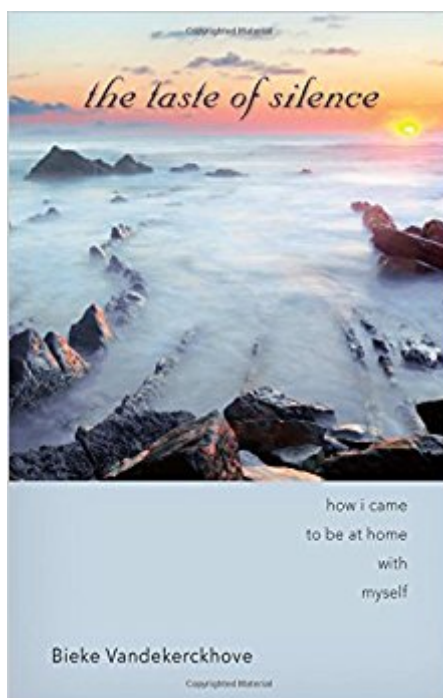


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# The Taste Of Silence: How I Came To Be At Home With Myself



## Synopsis

At nineteen Bieke Vandekerckhove fell ill. The diagnosis was devastating: the fatal motor neuron disease ALS. Life expectancy: two to five years. So what did she do with the paltry bit of life that was left? By force of circumstance she was led to Saint Lioba Convent in Egmond-Binnen. There she learned Benedictine spirituality and to pray the psalms, which influenced her life for good. Three years later she learned that her illness had gone into remission but that it could flare up again at any time. She has been living with ALS for twenty years now. She is married and has two assistants to help her as necessary. Ten years ago she found the silence of Zen. This encounter also proved decisive. The Taste of Silence reflects what she experienced, saw, and tasted in the stillness of life: "Benedictine spirituality and Zen Buddhism became the two lungs through which I breathe."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Learn to be still and learn to do nothing and learn to wait. The secret of those who became giants always lay in this: they were prepared for the long haul." Thus wrote poet Henriette Roland Holst. It is what Bieke Vandekerckhove wanted to learn living with an incurable disease, she had to. Listening, meditating, persevering in the silence, she became one of the giants, and she wrote a book that consoles. Huub Oosterhuis, Dutch theologian, poet, author, liturgist, and ecumenist yet sometimes we may suddenly perceive an eternal light in the midst of the worst tribulations. There is much in life that does not make any sense, so we need

witnesses whose life says: and yet! and who keep on smiling through their tears. This book is such a smile, compelling in its authenticity. Benoît Standaert, Benedictine Monk of Saint Andrew's Abbey in Bruges, Belgium, Author of *Sharing Sacred Space: Interreligious Dialogue as Spiritual Encounter* Bieke Vandekerckhove's story shows the way spirituality and religion get synchronized in the paradox classically stated by Polonius in *Hamlet*: "by indirections find directions out." Patrick Henry, *On Being* blog An insightful and absorbing memoir. Written poetically, the chapters—some only a page and a half—evoke the connectedness that Vandekerckhove felt toward the divine. Diane Scharper, *National Catholic Reporter* "They say that the book you need to read finds you at the time you most need to read it. That was the case here. After an initial descent into darkness, [Bieke] found strength by making an inner journey into the deep silence that resides inside us all. Her description of her journey is remarkable." Ron Rolheiser, OMI from "My Top Books for 2015" "The author's experiences prove that Benedictine spirituality can be a healing grace. Many of us have had to face an impenetrable wall. Contemplative prayer and meditation can bring down that wall—helping us to endure the winter of our life and move forward to the hope inherent in spring." Thomas J. Rillo, *Saint Meinrad's Benedictine Oblate Newsletter*

Bieke Vandekerckhove (born 1969) lived in Kuurne, Belgium. In 1988, when she was a psychology major at the University of Leuven, she was diagnosed with ALS and became paralyzed from the pelvis up. With round-the-clock help from husband Bart Verhulst and various assistants, she led an active life of teaching, counseling, and writing for, among others, *Volzin* and *Tertio*. Until recently she regularly conducted Zen meetings and retreats at the Benedictine Sint-Andries Abbey in Zevenkerken, Belgium. In 2014 Bieke Vandekerckhove received formal transmission as Zen Master (Ch'an Ssu) in the Chinese Ch'an tradition from internationally known Zen Master Prof. Ton Lathouwers, himself the Dharma-Successor of Ch'an Master Teh Cheng, longtime head of the Guang Hua Ch'an School in China. On the occasion, she received the name Xia Fan Zhi Guang, meaning "Light of Kenosis." Bieke passed away in her home, early in the evening on September 7, 2015.

*The Taste of Silence* is a lush, beautifully written look at the possibilities for transformation that occur after you've hit the wall, after you've gone as far as you can possibly go. Its structured as a series of essays loosely organized around the theme of silence. I read it slowly, then again even more slowly. I've given the book to a number of friends who also report reading it slowly, then again even more slowly. The author's spiritual path is jointly contemplative Christianity and Zen; the

concepts and questions she explores are timeless and universal.

A very profound journey to silence for the author. I'm finding it provides a fascinating look through pain and struggle from the author's life circumstance that I had not expected.

Mostly paralyzed in her teens, Bieke has a lot of time to think and think she does. Asking the big questions she mixes Christianity and Buddhism with a few ideas of her own. Normally I underline sentences or paragraphs, here I have underlined pages. The book is upbeat and well worth the read.

Good as far as it goes. No substantial coherence. It's OK. True experience.

An inspiring and beautiful book ! I love the way it integrates Catholic spirituality and Zen.

Each chapter is like a retreat, offering peace and calm that seems to be what so many are craving today. This is a great book for book clubs.

Bieke expresses the benefits of silence beautifully

Great reflections. Very glad I got this book.

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