

Holy Silence, J. Brent Bill, Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan. 142 pages
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For almost two hundred years, where I now live was at the intersection of fighting streets between Catholics and Protestants. Two hundred years earlier, it was enveloped in the battleground between Cavaliers and Roundheads, horrendous massacres that on a religious level, was about which took priority, the preached Word of God or the Sacraments of the Church. Out of that tragedy and the numbing silence of the soul that followed, arose the idea of an experiment in radical Christianity, or Quakerism, the subject matter of J. Brent Bill's book entitled, "Holy Silence".

What if Christianity was never supposed to be about books, sermons, songs, rituals, hierarchy or clergy? What if the Good News was simply about the Resurrection Power of the Spirit of Love become incarnate in human lives? What if the Resurrected Jesus is made present to us whenever two or three wait expectantly in silence together? What if Elijah was right, that God comes to us when we await in silence? Should worship be, as Habakkuk put it, the whole Earth keeping in silence before its Creator? Was holy silence where Jesus retreated to in prayer? Is the clue to understanding Jesus' parables given to us when people speak out of the depths of their hearts, speaking to the testimony of the sacramental nature of every moment and of everyday, a spirituality open to everyone, a worship meeting in which all may participate if led by the Spirit to do so?

Many years ago I fell in love with the Community of the Resurrection at Mirfield in Yorkshire. I found its holy silence addictive - the noise of Liverpool by contrast, madness. Sacraments, silence and proclamation were a single piece at its Mother House. I had heard of Quakers but it was only many years later that I was to experience the liberating power of its holy silence - the lived sacrament of every moment and every day. Brent Bill is conscious of the irony of writing about silence. For all its limitations it acts as a good introduction to Quaker spirituality. In the spirit of ecumenism, I recommend it as a definite must for your Lenten reading.