

Sacramental Silence
Encountering God in Stillness
A Book Proposal
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Overview

“The less form in religion the better, since God is a Spirit; ... the more silent, the more suitable to the language of a Spirit.” So said seventeenth century Quaker William Penn said, urging Christians to embrace silence as a religious practice. *Sacramental Silence* extends Penn’s invitation to today’s readers. It is not about stillness, as such, but rather about encountering God in a living and vital holy hush. Neither memoir nor mere instructional book, *Sacramental Silence* is a slender volume that encourages women and men to undertake a journey of spiritual silence. Their destination is a quiet inner place where God teaches them that they “might come to receive freely from Him.”

Though Penn spoke as a Quaker, Quakers did not invent spiritual silence. Silence as a religious practice has a long history – from non-Christian faiths such as Buddhism and Native American spirituality, to the desert fathers and monasticism of the Catholic church. *Sacramental Silence*, while acknowledging the breadth of religious silence, focuses on Christian practice as informed by Quaker faith, which has been influential in my own spiritual formation.

So who are the Quakers and how did silence come to hold a central place in their religious practice? They were born in the English dissenting church era, where armed factions warred over worship style and substance. One reason they adopted their distinctive perspective on holy silence is found in their official name -- the Religious Society of Friends. They take that name from a verse in the Gospel of John where Jesus says, “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.” These Friends of Jesus wanted to hear His voice. So they worshipped in silence, feeling that the best way to hear that voice was to wait for Christ to speak. The

belief that God would speak to them out of the silence came from their leader George Fox. Fox was a spiritually hungry young man. Disgusted with the hypocrisy of the organized religion of his day, Fox spent a lot of time alone hoping to encounter God in a way that spoke to his soul's deepest desires. Finally, "when all my hopes in ... all men were gone," while reading the Bible in silence, he heard a voice saying, "There is even one, Christ Jesus, who can speak to your condition." When he heard it, he reported, "... my heart did leap for joy."

Fox and the other Friends believed that the Spirit speaks to us deep in our souls when we are silent and still. They agreed with Fox that, "Christ was the true teacher within; and that God was come to teach His people himself, ...that they might come to receive freely from Him." If they were to be taught by Christ, "the true teacher within," then they reckoned that silence was the best way to hear their teacher.

The practice of Quaker silence has continued for more than 350 years. Holy silence invites us to an immediate personal encounter with God. Quaker silence is communion with God. As one group of Friends wrote, "In silence, without rite or symbol, we have known the Spirit of Christ so convincingly present ... [that] this is our Eucharist and our Communion.

Quakers believe that when we are silent then the Spirit of God grants us insights, guidance, and understanding of spiritual truth. This is not mysticism for mysticism's sake. Quaker silence helps us know God's will. Knowing what God wants is important because Quakers believe that faith and daily living must be married. Holy silence infuses us with God's spirit and power so that we can live faithfully in the common ventures of life. As English Friend William Littleboy wrote, "God is above all the God of the normal. In the common facts and circumstances of life He draws near to us, quietly He teaches us in the routine of life's trifles, gently, and unnoticed His guidance comes to us through the channels of 'reason [and] judgment' ... we have been taught by Him when we least suspected it; we have been guided ... though the guiding hand rested upon us so lightly that we were unaware of its touch."

This "guiding hand" that rests lightly upon us is best felt when we are silent and still. Sacramental silence is a Quaker practice that speaks hope to many Christians, engulfed as we are in world of sound and furious activity.

Purpose

Sacramental Silence introduces the Friendly practice of holy silence to a wide Christian audience. It shares with readers how Quakers use holy silence as a tool to deeper faith and communion with God. Those who seek more silence in their lives will learn ways of implementing this holy silence into their own faith lives. It is ultimately a book aimed at helping readers' hearts "leap for joy."

Audience/Readership

Sacramental Silence is intended for a primarily Christian audience, though others (readers interested in spiritual silence) will find it helpful as well. It is not presented as something the reader will think, "Oh great, one more thing to do," but rather as a centering stillness that they look forward to as a Sabbath in the midst of daily life. Individuals, both laity and clergy, will find it a helpful addition to their current spiritual library. It can be used for personal religious growth and as part of study of Christian spiritual practice. The book is ideal for faith study groups and reading clubs.

Length and Tone

Sacramental Silence will be around 25,000 words long – similar in nature to Paraclete's *That We May Perfectly Love Thee: Preparing Our Hearts for the Eucharist* by Robert Benson or *Mudhouse Sabbath* by Lauren Winner. The tone is conversational, hospitable, winsome, and whimsical.

Title Comparison

"Googling" quickly turns up a list of books that address spiritual silence. *Silence: How to Find Inner Peace in a Busy World* (256 pages, Rodmell Press, 2003) by Christina Feldman is a coffee table book that offers a history of silence, teaches readers how to cultivate it, and draws heavily on Buddhism and meditation techniques. Richard Mahler's *Stillness: Daily Gifts of Solitude* (166, Red Wheel, 2003) is a combination memoir and guide. It is based on Mahler's using work as a caretaker on a remote ranch as a way of experiencing an extended period of silence and contemplation. His emphasis is on seeking regular periods of quiet through meditation, yoga, or spending time alone

outdoors as a way to reduce stress and live more simply. It does not have specific focus on religion.

Silent Fire: Bringing the Spirituality of Silence to Everyday Life (224 pages, Crown Publishing, 2002) by James A. Connor is the story of how, as newly ordained Jesuit priest, Connor was called in to console a couple whose baby had been killed in a freak accident. It is less a book about recovering silence as a spiritual practice than it is a spiritual memoir of how Connor reestablishes his relationship to God through a variety of silences, including the Native American “circle of silence.”

Two books appear to be similar to *Sacramental Silence*'s Christian emphasis – but closer examination shows that they are not. *Keeping Silence: Christian Practices for Entering Stillness* (112 pages, Morehouse Publishing, 2002) by Episcopal priest C.W. McPherson explores the positive effects practicing silence has on body, soul, and mind. He also gives the historical background for, and instructions in, a variety of Christian practices, including psalm repetition, Ignatian meditation, walking the labyrinth, and more. Peter-Damian Belisle's *The Language of Silence: The Changing Face of Monastic Solitude* (160 pages, Orbis, 2003) is a survey of the quest for solitude with God from the early desert monastic to the rise of monastic orders.

Sacramental Silence differs from all the above books in significant ways. While firmly grounded in Christian silence, it is informed by the unique Quaker understanding of silence. As I said in the opening of this proposal, *Sacramental Silence* is not a memoir or how to find spiritual rest in three easy steps book. It is an invitation to encounter God in a living sacred silence.

About the Author

While no expert in the art of holy silence, I am a long time practitioner of Quaker silence. I believe in the essential nature of sacramental silence as a way of meeting God. I even occasionally wear a button that says, “I am a Quaker – in case of emergency, please be quiet.” I am not entirely kidding. Silence is a deep part of my faith life – a ritual in a religious tradition that prides itself on lack of ritual.

I have written, co-written, or contributed to twenty books. My latest non-fiction book, *Imagination and Silence: A Contemporary Quaker Reader*, received a starred

review in *Publishers Weekly*. I have also written more than one hundred articles, reviews, and fiction pieces. My writing covers a wide range of styles and genres – from light humor to serious biography to newspaper reporting to book reviews to youth Bibles to video scripts and more. I teach writing at the graduate school level and in adult continuing education courses. I serve as a writing coach to a number of published writers.

I am also a student of Quakerism. I hold an MA in Quaker Studies from Earlham School of Religion (a Quaker seminary) and have been a recorded (“ordained” to non-Quakers) Friends minister for twenty-four years. I have also pastored Friends meetings (churches) large and small, rural and urban

Marketing Strategies and Potential Endorsers

There is a strong interest in books on silence (see the titles above) and things Quaker (Philip Gulley’s “Harmony” series, *The Barn at the End of the World : The Apprenticeship of a Quaker*, *Buddhist Shepherd* by Mary Rose O'Reilley, and *Plain Living: A Quaker Path to Simplicity* by Catherine Whitmire to name a few). This book has the double strength of addressing both topics from a unique perspective. It is not about all things Quaker nor is it about generic spiritual silence. That distinctiveness gives it a strong market.

Sacramental Silence is perfect for reviews or chapter excerpts in *The Christian Century*, *Weavings*, *Discipleship Journal*, *Books and Culture*, *Image*, *Mars Hill Review*, and more. It would be a good selection for the “One Spirit” book club which currently offers *Stillness Speaks* by Eckhart Tolle and *The Little Book of Letting Go* by Hugh Prather (both addressing silence, though not from a Christian perspective) as featured titles.

Through my position as executive vice president of the Indianapolis Center for Congregations, I can ensure that it will be listed on the “Congregational Resource Guide” (www.congregationalresources.org). The “Congregational Resource Guide” is a joint project of the Indianapolis Center for Congregations and the Alban Institute. Its purpose is to present the “best of the best” to local congregational leaders nationally and internationally. *Sacramental Silence* is a perfect fit for the “Spirituality” section, as well

as “Adult Faith Formation.” Alban Institute’s *Congregations* (a quarterly journal) will also review the book.

In addition, I am a frequent conference speaker and retreat leader. I schlep books wherever I attend or speak. I will promote it at bookstores and library readings. I did this most recently with *Imagination and Spirit* – appearing at libraries, bookstores, churches, retreat centers, and being a featured author at the Indiana Historical Society’s “Holiday Author Fair” and the Indiana Library Federation’s annual conference.

Finally, I am confident that the book would find strong readership among Friends (who love to read and buy books by the score). It will be reviewed in at least two national Quaker monthlies (*Friends Journal* – of which I am the assistant book review editor – and *Quaker Life*). I will also promote it for the international Friends women’s society’s annual reading program and the Quaker Leaders Book Club.

Potential endorsers include Cynthia Woolever (professor at Hartford Seminary), Scott Russell Sanders (author *The Force of Spirit* and others), Philip Gulley (author of Harper SanFrancisco’s best-selling Harmony series and *If Grace Is True*), L. Gregory Jones (Dean of Duke Divinity School and columnist for *The Christian Century*), and Diana Butler Bass (director of “The Project on Congregations of Intentional Practice: A Study of Mainline Vitality” at Virginia Theological Seminary and author of *Strength for the Journey: A Pilgrimage of Faith in Community*, named one of the best religion books of 2003 by *Publishers Weekly*). I have personal contact with many of these folks.

Working Table of Contents

Chapter 1 – A Silence Deeper than Words

Sacramental Silence opens with me attending Sunday morning meeting for worship at South Starksboro Friends Meeting in Vermont. This is a way of introducing key concepts about Quakers and holy silence – that Quaker silence is filled with the holy expectation of encountering God, is active, and is sacramental.

Chapter 2 – Holy Silence

Chapter 2 begins by acknowledging silence in religious tradition – both non-Christian (Buddhist and Native American) and Christian (the desert fathers, monastic traditions, continental mystics). It continues with a description of what sets Quaker silence apart from other religious silences. What makes it different is, “That brazen expectation [of hearing the voice of God]...,” says writer Scott Russell Sanders. This chapter necessarily contains a very brief Quaker history setting up why Friends came to use silence as their

sacrament. It addresses the Quaker belief that holy silence is filled with expectation -- that God will be heard and that in that hearing lives are changed and those gathered become a spiritual community.

Chapter 3 – Silence and Solitude

“True silence is the rest of the mind; and is to the spirit, what sleep is to the body, nourishment and refreshment,” said William Penn. This chapter presents a way of using holy silence as nourishment and refreshment in personal spiritual growth. It focuses on solitary silence as a Christian discipline. It sets up silence as pathway into learning how to live the Gospel story with its emphasis on simplicity, equality, justice, and truth. Holy silence is a way to follow St. Paul’s injunction to pray without ceasing. The chapter begins explaining the processes of being alone with God in silence. It also talks about how silence can be a way of sharing God’s love with others – especially those who are grieving.

Chapter 4 – A Living Silence

This chapter explores what it means to hold silence as a group and how that differs from group meditation – with the emphasis on its sacramental nature. It talks about how this gathered worship (as Quakers call it) is not absence of noise, but rather the expectation that Christ will come among His people Himself. As English Friend John Harvey said, “In a meeting for worship Friends gather in silence as a congregation of seeking souls, and as they unite together in worship there comes a spiritual harmony.” This chapter examines how to practice sacramental silence in group settings like church retreats or small worship groups.

Chapter 5 – Learning to be Silent

So how does a person learn to “hold silence?” This chapter looks at the practical process for learning silence. It talks about silence as an act of self-surrender and how inner silence is an offering to God. It also shares how to use “Queries” – questions aimed at spiritual self-assessment. It shares techniques for centering – including posture, breathing, and creating your own inner sanctuary and liturgy. It also offers encouragement – the way of silence is not easy. “The mind wanders and the will falters again and again ... But it is foolish to allow failures in concentration ‘to plunge us into profitless self-condemnation’ ... God is similarly pleased with our efforts and understanding of our many failures.” (Thomas Green)

Backmatter

This section of the book includes a variety of tools for helping readers learn more about practicing silence. One tool is a brief glossary of Quaker terms. Another is a list of suggestions for further reading in silences, spiritual disciplines, and Quakers. This list includes some books written primarily for a Quaker audience such as *Encounter With Silence: Reflections from the Quaker Tradition* by John Punshon (foreword by Matthew Fox) and *The Amazing Fact of Quaker Worship* by George H. Gorman. The last section is one of Queries on silence. The purpose of Queries is to direct our attention to the “true source of spiritual strength and promote individual faithfulness to Christ.” (*Faith and Practice*, Western Yearly Meeting of Friends, 1986)

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Writing Biographical Information

Books Published

Imagination and Spirit: A Contemporary Quaker Reader, Friends United Press, 2002
The Secret Junior High Survival Guide, Fleming H. Revell, 1993
Stuff Your Guidance Counselor Never Told You, Fleming H. Revell, 1990
Cruisin' and Choosin', Fleming H. Revell, 1989
Lunch Is My Favorite Subject, Fleming H. Revell, 1987
How To Be A Friend in An UnFriendly World, Friends United Press, 1987
Faith and Practice: A Study Guide, Western Yearly Meeting, 1986
Counselor-In-Training Training Course, Western Yearly Meeting, 1986
Stay Tuned, Fleming H. Revell, 1985
Rock and Roll: Proceed With Caution, Fleming H. Revell, 1984;1987
David B. Updegraff: Quaker Holiness Preacher, Friends United Press, 1984

Books Co-authored or Contributed To

Forty Days and Forty Bytes: Computers and Your Congregation, The Alban Institute, 2004, co-author.
Wedding Blessings: Prayers and Poems Celebrating Love and Marriage, Random House/Broadway Books, 2003, contributor.
Keeping the Faith, Guild Press of Indiana, 2003, contributor.
Quaker Lite 2 ½: The Lite Within, The Lite Company, 2002, co-author.
Quaker Lite, The Lite Company, 1998, contributor.
Creative Worship Ideas, Group Publishing, 1993, contributor.
The Youth Study Bible, Group Publishing, 1991, contributor.
The Youth Group Meeting Guide, Group Publishing, 1988, contributor.
The Group Retreat Book, Group Publishing, 1983, contributor.

Periodicals

Congregations, *The Christian Century*, *Church Business*, *The Muncie Star-Press*, *Friends Journal*, *Christianity and the Arts*, *Parenting Today's Teen*, *Parish Works*, *Group*, *Youth Update*, *FreeWay*, *Quaker Life*, *The Earlhamite*, *NACBA Ledger*, *Bread*, *New Castle Courier-Times*, and many more.

At-large editor of *Congregations* and assistant book review editor of *Friends Journal*.
Served as editor of *Sounds of Silence*, *ESR Reports*, *Nexus*, and *Western Work*

Listed in *Indiana Childrens Book Authors and Illustrators*, *Contemporary Authors*, *Who's Who in Religion*, and *Who's Who Among US Authors and Editors*

Education:

Earlham School of Religion	M.A.
Wilmington College	A.B.
Chatfield College	A.A.

Chapter One
A Silence Deeper than Words

My short redheaded wife Nancy and I marveled as fall colors moved down the mountain across from the Vermont country inn where we stayed. For seven days we watched the glorious golds, russets, and oranges merge into the greens of the valleys. We stood on top of mountains with views of several states and Canada while the wind whipped what little hair I have left. We wound our rental car along closed in, curvy country roads bordered by rushing streams and waterfalls, never able to see more than a few hundred yards in front or a few hundred feet up. For two flatlanders from Indiana, the scenery was overwhelming. I was almost ready to fly back to the safety of Indiana scenery with its gentler risings and fallings and bigger sky.

But it was Sunday morning. *First Day* morning, as older Quakers say. So, before heading to the airport, we drove to South Starksboro Friends Meeting. It was a setting dreamed up by the Vermont tourism council – an 1826 era plain white clapboard meetinghouse, its rectangular, steeple-lessness tucked into a clearing halfway up a mountain. Tombstones dotted the meetinghouse grounds. Slanted sunlight threw the carvings into stark relief.

We took our obligatory leaf peeper pictures while Vermonters indulgently smiled on. Then we made our way across the grass, through the weathered front door, over the worn wood floor, and settled onto the benches. No modern, padded, or comfortable church pews for us simple Friends. No central heating, either. A big black wood stove clanked noisily, stoked for Sunday *Meeting*. Afghans and comforters sat stacked on one

of the benches for those wanting to ward off the chill. Sunlight softened by old clear, wavy glassed windows filled the room. So did God's glory.

Seven other Friends were there besides Nancy and me. This small group was less than a tenth of the size of the Quaker congregation we normally worship with in Indiana. It was a traditional Friends service –conducted in silence. There was no bulletin, no paid preacher, no choir. There was an old pump organ, but it was tucked in a corner and needed dusting. Any music or message would arise out of the silence – but only if God's spirit lead someone to sing or share. The preacher in me looked for a clock – it is always where the parson, if not the congregation, can see it. There wasn't one. In spite of that, we all fell silent at about the same time. Some of us bowed our heads. Others wiggled in the benches for a moment, searching perhaps for a comfortable hollow in the bench worn by someone's backside. Exterior sound fell away, save for the ticking of the warming wood stove, the popping of burning wood, and the occasional stifled cough.

I looked and saw Nancy, backlit by sunlight through the window. Her head was bowed, blue eyes open, and hands folded in her lap. My gaze returned to the wood-planked floor between my feet. I took off my glasses and closed my eyes. Soon interior noise fell away. Thoughts of the late afternoon airplane flight to Indianapolis, worries about work waiting for me at the office, and the thousands of things that usually flood my mind when outside noise stops, slowly vanished. They dropped into a well of holy silence. I let myself be guided into the deep waters of the soul. Soon I was enveloped in a silence deeper than words can express.

That is when it happened. The only thing I can compare it to is the Catholic belief that in the "celebration of Mass... Christ is really present to the assembly gathered in his

name.” It is the same way with silence for Quakers. Friends believe that Christ is truly present – except we have no host to elevate or priest to preside. Rather, we believe that when our hearts, minds, and souls are still, and we wait expectantly in holy silence, that the real presence of Christ is there. That October day, on the side of the Green Mountains, Jesus was good to his word that, “where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”ⁱ In the deep silence, where outer and inner noise ceased, we became what Quakers call *a gathered meeting* – gathered together and before God. Christ came among us– we felt Him in the electrified air. I was charged with an awareness of the miraculous – the marrow of my bones hummed in holy recognition of the One who had stood at the dawn of creation and called the world into being. And it was not just happening to me.

The presence of Christ among us changed the hour. Instead of enduring sixty minutes of stagnant silence dragging by, we felt that the first chapter of John’s gospel had come to life in Vermont – “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”ⁱⁱ We saw grace and truth reflected in the people around us, as if something had been lit deep inside and now shone from their faces. It was a true Sabbath – free from noise and busy-ness as we worshipped and were fed. Though no outward words were spoken, no formal prayers recited, no music played softly in the background to set a mood, the glory of God had worked its way into the deepest parts of our hearts and out to our fingers and toes and noses. Nancy and I had come to Vermont hoping for some respite from elder-care and work. We were leaving with our spirits rejuvenated

from an experience that had nothing to do with fall foliage. The Creator, who calls us by name and calls us his own, had breathed his blessing upon us.

Then, too soon, Meeting was over. Don, the person next to me, shifted and shook my hand – the sign among Friends that *Meeting for Worship* is ended. No loud amen's or formal benedictions for us. Instead we smiled. For a long while no one said anything. No one wanted to break the holiness of the moment. But then our humanness broke in. Small talk broke out. Friends wanted news of mutual acquaintances back in Indiana. We needed to decide whose turn it was to close off the woodstove. Still, even in this after Meeting chit-chat, we knew that we were now the body of Christ in a way we did not normally feel during our workaday work.

Even as I tell you that story, I am struck by the absurdity of trying to write about silence. Who needs words about silence? Why not just keep silent? Besides, how do you put into words something that is deeper than words?

The only reason for trying is that the Friends' approach to silence is a pathway to God that sates my spirit unlike anything else I have ever tried. I appreciate liturgy, hymn singing, sermons, and other religious rituals. But Quaker silence speaks to my spiritual condition in way nothing else does. Quaker silence is not just for me or old men on oat boxes or in classic movies, either. It offers something deep for any woman or man who is hungry for fresh ways of connecting with God.

Friendly silence speaks – yes, speaks, oddly enough – to the hunger for silence evident in our culture. Just look at the rising interest in silent retreats and contemplative reading. Something in our souls tells us that getting quiet is a good way to meet God.

That is something the prophet Elijah discovered. When he needed to hear God, the Lord told him:

“Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Now Elijah was not a Quaker, though we would be happy to claim him. Come to think of it, maybe Elijah was the first Friend. He learned that God was in “a gentle whisper.” What Elijah’s story teaches us lies at the heart of Friends silence. Quaker silence is about the real presence of Christ being with us in an intimate way. Quaker silence encourages us to relax so deeply in the love of God that we hear the Spirit’s voice whispering softly in our soul’s ear.

It should not be hard for us to see silence as a form of intimacy. After all, we experience it with our friends and lovers. When we really want to hear, and be heard by, someone we love, we do not go rushing into noisy crowds. As relationships grow deeper and more intimate, we spend more and more quiet time alone with our lover. We talk in low tones about the things that matter. We do not shout them to each other. We may shout about them to others, but quietness is the hallmark of love.

That is true, too, when we meet the great Lover of our Souls. Christ comes to us when our hearts and minds are silent and still. That is why Quaker silence is pregnant with holy expectation. It is not that we do not expect anything to happen. Quite the

opposite. Friends' silence is filled with anticipation that Christ will be there. And not in some abstract, vaguely spiritual feel good way, either. We think that Christ comes in a real, physically present way. We think that in the same way that Catholics believe that when the host is elevated it becomes the literal body and blood of Jesus -- and not just some symbol. As Flannery O'Connor, the great Catholic writer, once said of Eucharist, "Well, if it's a symbol, to hell with it.' ... it is the center of existence for me; all the rest of life is expendable."

It is not just some symbol. It is Christ's coming. In reality. Friends feel that way about silence. The deep silence of the soul is our Eucharist. Rufus Jones, a Quaker mystic and writer of the twentieth century said of sacramental silence that, "it may be an intensified pause, a vitalized hush, a creative quiet, an actual moment of mutual and reciprocal correspondence with God. The actual meeting of man with God and God with man is the very crown and culmination of what we can do with our human life here on earth."

"The actual meeting of man with God and God with man is the very crown and culmination of what we can do with our human life." That is what makes Quaker silence different from other silences. Even other spiritual silences. But this meeting, since it happens in our spirits and souls, may not seem so different to an outsider who sees us practicing it. She would not see any angels descending. He would not notice halos appearing over our heads. There is no physical evidence of the life changing activity that goes on inside us as we feed on Christ in our souls. "Outwardly," says Friend Thomas Kelley, "all silences seem alike, as all minutes are alike by the clock. But inwardly the

Divine Leader of worship directs us ... and may in the silence bring an inward climax which is definite as the climax of the Mass when the host is elevated in adoration.”

This sacramental language may seem somewhat strong from a group that discarded all of the Church’s rituals. But Quakers only abandoned them in favor of what they considered inner sacraments full of spiritual power. They found that they met Christ in holy silence. They feasted on him in their hearts. Then they were empowered to live lives of faith and practice. Silence was their means of throwing off the outward and moving to the inward, mystical union with Christ.

Friends believe that this inward, mystical union is more likely to happen if we approach silence expectantly. Psalm 46:10 urges us to, “Be still, and know that I am God.” Friends come in silence, alone or in community, to know God.

Even though the old Quaker joke is that we are called to, “Don’t just do something, sit there,” holy silence is more than just sitting there. Silence is something we do, not something done to us. It is a participatory act. It engages our heart, mind, soul, and body. We actively listen for the voice of the Beloved. Quaker silence is not passive. After all, how could Holy Communion, which deepens our faith and fills us with passionate love for God, ever be inactive?

Quakers have no corner on sacramental silence. It is a way that is open to anyone who wants a new experience of God. It is the way of holy silence that can be for you, as it is for Friends, a “Eucharist and Communion.”

ⁱ Matthew 18:20

ⁱⁱ John 1:14

ⁱⁱⁱ 1 Kings 19:11-12