

Quiet

To be quiet is to refrain from talking, or at least from talking too much. To be quiet can also involve life style, not just language: we can speak of a quiet person as one who retreats to the background, doesn't impose himself. At his strongest the quiet person may be 'meek,' the term Jesus Christ applied to 'those who will inherit the Kingdom.' That is, this person may contain the strength of the knowledge of good and evil, or truth and falsehood, yet may be standing in the corner without saying anything.

Examples

1 The power of quietness

I have an old friend who is very quiet. Though she is highly articulate, both as a musician and a writer—recently a long book on the clavichord—she has no taste for scoring in conversation. You might almost say that, for her, conversation, speaking up, is a violation of the deeper nature each of us is under our language. Writing, I can hear her say, is the clearest record of thought and feeling, because it represents primary language, language before we have given it particular expression in writing or speaking. This friend of mine, therefore, is quiet in a bold sense, giving full play to the voices she and the world entertain as part of their discussion. She is quiet in a strict sense, too, like the 17th century Quietists who were quiet in order to give God a place to speak in them.

2 Quiet provocation

Pastor U, in southern Nigeria, is short in stature, reserved in speech, and the kind of person you might barely notice. He prefaces every statement by 'praise the Lord,' but even with that phrase he is chary. When not directing the Shell Oil Employee Middle School, for his region, he is either attending church service or polishing his car, which he does with great care. He has three children with him in Ughelli, where he rents from us, and his mind, for what one could presume, is on his wife and two other children, back home in Calabar. Pastor U has cut his whole life, not only his language, back to simplicities, and yet for that reason, somehow, his quiet existence becomes a provocation to speak with him and to know him better. His being there, his quiet routine, his 'praise the lord' prefaces: all these surfaces provoke one's desire to know him better.