

May 18, 1986

Filemona's reference to the two great commandments, that we love God with all the power of our being, and that we love our neighbor as ourself, brings to mind the question of how our love for our neighbor should affect our approach to his way of loving God--in particular, to his way of worship.

I remember, having been brought up as a Roman Catholic, being told that it was wrong to enter a Protestant Church. If a friend or colleague was getting married in a Protestant Church, we had to seek the permission of our priest to attend the wedding.

Such is the evolution of the world that things are now, happily, quite different. For example, I was in Nairobi two years ago at the World Conference on Religion and Peace. One of the striking things about this Conference was the full-hearted way all participants shared in each others' religious worship. I remember in particular one service led by Shinto priests. The Shinto priests were wearing very elaborate and beautiful garb, not at all in the fashion of Quaker simplicity. Yet the service was characterized by large measures of silence, silence which was interrupted not by spoken messages, but by occasional dry sounds--such as three slow handclaps, or the striking together of two pieces of wood.

At one point in the ceremony the Shinto priests invited a Roman Catholic Archbishop to join in the ceremony, and he took his place on the "altar" with them, and followed them as one by one they bowed low to a pile of vegetables and clapped their hands at them. And I remembered in that moment the days when we were forbidden to enter other Christian Churches, and how unlikely I would have thought it to be that some day I would be present when a Catholic Archbishop bowed and clapped his hands at a pile of vegetables in a Shinto worship service!

That such a profound change of attitude is possible is a sign of hope. Nothing the Archbishop did in Nairobi compromised his devotion to the celebration of the Eucharist; it simply dignified it by adding to it an expression of love for his fellow human beings from worlds and cultures away--an expression of love connected to those things which mattered to them the most, that is, their religious faith. Thus the Archbishop connected the first and the second of the two great laws of the love of God and the love of neighbor.

We have come together this weekend to serve the Religious Society of Friends by planning the next Triennial Gathering of Quakers from around the world. Once again, Friends who worship in silence will be thrown together with those who hire ministers, sing hymns, read Scripture, and give and listen to prepared homilies. This gap in custom is not nearly so broad as that faced and bridged by the Roman Catholic Archbishop and the Shinto

priests in Nairobi. Let us do all we can to lay the groundwork so that Friends will lift each other up with generosity and love, and follow the example of the Roman Catholic Archbishop by participating fully and open-heartedly in those things which matter to each other the most.

(Note: Add some interpretive material about the significance of the Shinto custom of paying homage to natural objects--rocks, trees, vegetables).