

September 23, 1984

A couple of weeks ago I was visiting with the Quakers in a remote village in western Kenya. Mbakalo Village was in the interior of the interior of the interior, so to speak, for it was not on any map and far from any paved roads. Even what was described to me as the nearest big town, Naitiri, was not on any map.

I finally did find Mbakalo Village after some strenuous searching, and was received warmly and lovingly by the Friends there. For my five day stay, I was put up with a family that had one of the very few masonry houses in the area, and I was royally treated in every respect.

The family with whom I stayed had a young child, a little girl about two years old. She had never seen a white person before, and once I arrived she took one look at me, her face became wreathed in terror, and she ran screaming from the room.

No amount of coaxing was able to reconcile this frightened little girl to the pallid and ghost-like vestige of a human being who had suddenly intruded with his big pointy nose in her family's routine. It was always necessary that she be held in the arms of a familiar adult when in my presence, and if I moved too suddenly she would begin whimpering.

This did not trouble me at all; indeed, it was useful to know how frightening one can appear in certain contexts. But I could tell that the situation really troubled her parents, who had a very refined sense of the hospitality they wished to offer a guest from afar. So on the second day, when I came home for lunch, as soon as I entered the room where the little girl was, before she herself could react, I looked at her, screamed, and ran out the door. I could sense from outside the house the confusion back in the room, and I peeked around the door jam until I could see the little girl, and then when my eyes fell on her I winced and withdrew, as if in panic. She quickly caught on, and putting on a very fierce face, began to stalk me, and then to chase me, first to the chicken coop, then to the corn crib, and eventually out into the fields. Gradually I let the space between us diminish until, eventually, she caught me and a reconciliation took place.

Our faith is one that should remove terrors. It should change our perspective so that what once seemed alien and frightening is understood as part of a larger unity. For we know that all that exists has proceeded from one Word, that we are but a strand in an intricately woven pattern, of wondrous design, and that if we could but rise to a spiritual vantage point from which we could see it whole, we would, like St. Francis of Assisi, feel only praise and joy at the Creation, and a sense of divine kinship with all that exists.