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AFFIRMING REVERENCE FOR LIFE

By Marvin Meyer

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One of the vivid images, among others, that comes to mind when I think of Albert Schweitzer affirming reverence for life is the image of Schweitzer with his ants. This image has been made memorable by the dentist, artist, and author Frederick Franck, who lived and worked with Schweitzer for a time in the late 1950s and described his experiences in his book *Days with Albert Schweitzer: A Lambaréné Landscape*. Among the charming drawings in the book is one with the caption “Dr. Schweitzer entertains his ants.” Frederick was kind enough to present me with an artist’s proof of the drawing, and I have mounted it appropriately in my study among other drawings and prints. The drawing shows Schweitzer at eighty-six, bushy of hair, mustache, and eyebrows, hunched over his writing table, with pages of a manuscript tacked to a wall, sheets of paper on the table, and ants crawling over the sheets. Frederick describes Schweitzer encountering his ants: “For some years he has been watching this particular family of ants, a few hundred or a few thousand quite benign and harmless ones, which live in a nest somewhere under the floor boards of his room. After every meal he puts a little piece of fish under the kerosene lamp on his table; immediately the ants crawl up the table leg, walk in a neat line across the top piled with papers, and start to tackle the fish offering from all sides. It requires five or six of the tiny insects to transport a huge fragment of two cubic millimeters of fish across the table, down the leg to their residence. Dr. Schweitzer and I watched with delight how first the softer pieces of fish were chosen in preference to older, harder ones.”

Schweitzer affirming reverence for life: certainly reverence for life is expressed in Schweitzer’s treatment of his ants, as well as his mosquitoes, his chickens, and his pelican, Parsifal, but it should not be trivialized as being reducible to only that. Schweitzer considered reverence for life to be the elemental and universal ethical concept, the foundation for all sound moral thought and action, the necessary conclusion of clear thinking and reflection. When Schweitzer affirmed reverence for life, he affirmed the solidarity of all living things and the moral obligation of people who live in the midst of living things.

Schweitzer affirming reverence for life: certainly Schweitzer was neither the only person nor the first person to advocate love and solidarity among humans and all living things. But when he affirmed reverence for life, he did so in his own inimitable way, with the variety of formulations and affirmations typical of the man who did so many different things so well.

It is my intention in this meditation to examine four ways in which Albert Schweitzer articulated his understanding of reverence for life.

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First, Schweitzer affirmed reverence for life autobiographically. In his *Memoirs of Childhood and Youth* Schweitzer traced his sensitivity to the pain and suffering in the world back to his childhood, and he recounted stories, now familiar to many of us, of his concern for living things from the days of his early childhood. I quote from the translation by Kurt and Alice Bergel: “Already before I started school it seemed quite incomprehensible to me that my evening prayers were supposed to be limited to human beings. Therefore, when my mother had prayed with me and kissed me goodnight, I secretly added another prayer which I had made up myself for all living beings. It went like this: ‘Dear God, protect and bless all beings that breathe, keep all evil from them, and let them sleep in peace.’” Again: “I had an experience during my seventh or eighth year which made a deep impression on me. Heinrich Bräsch and I had made ourselves rubber band slingshots with which we could shoot small pebbles. One spring Sunday during Lent he said to me, ‘Come on, let’s go to the Rebberg and shoot birds.’ I hated this idea, but I did not contradict him for fear he might laugh at me. We approached a leafless tree in which birds, apparently unafraid of us, were singing sweetly in the morning air. Crouching like an Indian hunter, my friend put a pebble in his slingshot and took aim. Obeying his look of command, I did the same with terrible pangs of conscience and vowing to myself to miss. At that very moment the church bells began to ring out into the sunshine, mingling their chimes with the song of the birds. It was the warning bell, half an hour before the main bell ringing. For me, it was a voice from heaven. I put the slingshot aside, shooed the birds away so that they were safe from my friend, and ran home. Ever since then, when the bells of Passiontide ring out into the sunshine and the naked trees, I remember, deeply moved and grateful, how that day they rang into my heart the commandment ‘Thou shalt not kill.’” Schweitzer told other stories about an old horse being dragged to the slaughterhouse in Colmar, about his own dog, Phylax, and his neighbor’s dog, Löscher, about the revolting experience of impaling worms and hooking fish, and about the

treatment extended to Mausche the Jewish dealer when he passed through Günsbach.

When reflecting on his childhood, Schweitzer observed that the commandment not to kill and torture impacted him in a powerful way in his childhood and youth, and such may well be the case. It may well be that Schweitzer was predisposed from childhood and influenced by childhood experiences to feel a kinship with other living beings, a feeling that may anticipate his later affirmations of reverence for life. Yet Schweitzer's reflections, published in his *Memoirs of Childhood and Youth*, are based upon his sessions in 1923 with the psychologist and pastor Oscar Pfister in Zurich, when Schweitzer was depressed and in need of counsel. His reflections in his *Memoirs* allowed him the subsequent opportunity to present his own interpretation of the experiences of his childhood and youth, and while James Bentley's charges of "emotional duplicity" seem to me to put the matter too strongly, I suggest that Schweitzer may in fact have projected his values as an ethical thinker in his mid-forties back upon the experiences of his childhood. In his *Memoirs* we may learn as much about the values of the adult Schweitzer as we do about young Albert in and around Günsbach.

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Second, Schweitzer affirmed reverence for life exegetically. Albert Schweitzer grew up as a preacher's kid, and from an early age he was exposed to the interpretation of the Bible in an open, liberal, Lutheran context. He was given a copy of the New Testament, he says, at age eight, and he apparently entered the world of critical biblical scholarship already in his youth. If wise men from the East visited baby Jesus and offered him valuable gifts, young Albert asked, why was the holy family so poor? If shepherds saw the holy child in the manger, he wondered, why did none of them become followers of Jesus? And, not to leave out critical questions pertaining to the Jewish Scriptures, how could a rainstorm lasting forty days and forty nights produce a cataclysmic flood according to Genesis, he questioned, when a similarly heavy rain in Günsbach produced nothing of the kind? (His father's answer: in the old days it came down in bucketfuls, not in drops as it does today.)

Later, as a young man involved in military service for Germany, Schweitzer spent some of his leisure time opening his Greek New Testament and reading a text that was to play a powerful role in his exegesis of the Bible and in his interpretation of the person of Jesus: Matthew 10. In this chapter of Matthew, Jesus sends out the twelve followers to announce that heaven's kingdom is near, and he reassures them that, although they will be opposed, they will

not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Humanity — conventionally called the Son of Man — comes. The Son of Humanity who is coming, Schweitzer recognized, is the apocalyptic figure, announced in the book of Daniel and elsewhere, who will return to usher in God's kingdom at the end of time.

Schweitzer's radical proposal, following Johannes Weiss, was eventually published in *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God* and *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. The latter work in particular was a masterful piece; James M. Robinson observes that the reader must be "amazed at the undistracted persistence with which Schweitzer worked out a brilliant thesis as he worked his way through enormous masses of literature." Schweitzer proposed that Jesus was convinced — mistakenly, tragically — that the end was at hand, and that he was to be the instrument by whom the final kingdom would be brought in. Through Jesus' efforts, and through his death, God's kingdom would come. Of this Jesus was convinced, but he was wrong, heroically wrong, dead wrong. Schweitzer depicted Jesus' grand and misguided efforts in this manner: "There is silence all around. The Baptist appears, and cries, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Soon after that comes Jesus, and in the knowledge that he is the coming Son of Man lays hold of the wheel of the world to set it moving on that last revolution which is to bring all ordinary history to a close. It refuses to turn, and he throws himself upon it. Then it does turn, and crushes him. Instead of bringing in the eschatological conditions, he has destroyed them. The wheel rolls onward, and the mangled body of the one immeasurably great man, who was strong enough to think of himself as the spiritual ruler of humanity and to bend history to his purpose, is hanging upon it still. That is his victory and his reign."

Jesus, according to Schweitzer, is a stranger to our modern world. "He comes to us," Schweitzer writes in his conclusion to his *Quest*, "as one unknown, without a name." Schweitzer scoffed at the many scholars who engaged in a quest for the historical Jesus and ended up creating a modern Jesus in their own image, after their own likeness, reflecting their own values of their own world. Thus with regard to Ernest Renan's *Life of Jesus*, Schweitzer charges, "It is Christian art in the worst sense of the term — the art of the wax image. The gentle Jesus, the beautiful Mary, the fair Galileans who formed the retinue of the 'amiable carpenter,' might have been taken over in a body from the shop-window of an ecclesiastical art emporium in the Place St. Sulpice."

Schweitzer's reconstruction of the life and death of Jesus is not above reproach, however. In the face of a great deal of the scholarship of his day, and scholarship to the present day,

Schweitzer stressed the primary place and importance of the Gospel of Matthew (along with the Gospel of Mark). He chose his own scholarly path, passing by his brilliant teacher Heinrich Holtzmann, who championed the hypothesis of the primacy of Mark among the synoptic gospels. I believe in this respect Holtzmann was probably right and Schweitzer was probably wrong. Yet Schweitzer also needed Matthew: he needed Matthew 10 and the apocalyptic historical Jesus of Matthew 10 in order for his strange, foreign Jesus to emerge as the eschatological Son of Humanity. Though scholars in his day and ours have seen Matthew 10 as the creation of the later Christian church imposing its apocalyptic vision upon its portrait of Jesus, Schweitzer disagreed. He thought the apocalyptic Jesus to be the historical Jesus. Schweitzer's apocalyptic Jesus has remained one of the truly compelling images of Jesus throughout the twentieth century, but it is no wonder that many of us now gravitate to a different paradigm of Jesus, a non-apocalyptic paradigm of Jesus as a teacher of wisdom.

It was not that Schweitzer was willing to bypass the wisdom of Jesus. Schweitzer was touched by Jesus' ethic of love, and he was moved by the Sermon on the Mount as much as Tolstoy, Bonhoeffer, Gandhi, and others were. For Schweitzer, the sayings of Jesus communicated the message of love that was to remind him, increasingly, of reverence for life. Already in 1905, in a sermon he preached at St. Nikolai's Church on Sunday, November 19, he exclaimed, "What kind of a living person is Jesus? Don't search for formulas to describe him, even if they be hallowed by centuries. I almost got angry the other day when a religious person said to me that only someone who believes in the resurrection of the body and in the glorified body of the risen Christ can believe in the living Jesus Let me explain it in my way. The glorified body of Jesus is to be found in his sayings." If for Schweitzer those sayings are the sayings of an apocalyptic preacher announcing the end of the world, they remain the purer and stronger because of that. They are the charged, ethical sayings about the life of love in the interim, in the brief time before the end. They are the sayings about how to love when everything is at stake, when there is no room for weakness and vacillation. In his *Quest* Schweitzer describes our encounter with Jesus and his sayings as an encounter with "Jesus as spiritually risen within people," and Schweitzer himself becomes a proponent of "Jesus mysticism." And as Schweitzer puts it, from the early days of his career, this sort of ethical life, this strong commitment to love in the face of God's kingdom, may be called "practical eschatology," and Schweitzer refers to his Lambaréné hospital as an "outpost of the kingdom of God."

Later Schweitzer emphasized these sayings of Jesus even more emphatically, when he suggested that Jesus actually only used the language of apocalyptic to communicate his primary message, his ethical message of love. In his 1950 preface to *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* he wrote, “It was Jesus who began to spiritualize the ideas of the kingdom of God and the Messiah. He introduced into the late-Jewish conception of the kingdom his strong ethical emphasis on love, making this, and the consistent practice of it, the indispensable condition of entrance. By so doing he charged the late-Jewish idea of the kingdom of God with ethical forces, which transformed it into the spiritual and ethical reality with which we are familiar. Since the faith clung firmly to the ethical note, so dominant in the teaching of Jesus, it was able to reconcile and identify the two, neglecting those utterances in which Jesus voices the older eschatology.”

For Schweitzer, then, Jesus becomes preeminently the proclaimer of love, and for Schweitzer Jesus becomes — like Schweitzer himself — the proclaimer of reverence for life. In the epilogue to *Out of My Life and Thought* Schweitzer puts it quite succinctly: reverence for life is the ethic of Jesus, “the ethic of love widened into universality.” (On the universality of reverence for life, we may think with Schweitzer of God as infinite life, or of the Jain ethical principle of *ahimsa*, nonviolence toward all life. More on both of these matters below.) Suddenly Jesus, who was said to come to us as one unknown, does not seem so much a stranger to our times after all. He seems to be, as Henry Clark put it, the first liberal Christian, who under the guise of old-world apocalyptic preached a modern, humanitarian message of love and compassion. It is somewhat ironic but perhaps also indicative of Schweitzer’s own humanity that the person who called scholars to a self-critical stance in the face of their modernizing portraits of Jesus concluded that he and Jesus articulated the same basic ethical message for today.

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Third, Schweitzer affirmed reverence for life religiously in his study of world religions. Schweitzer was a student of world religions, but he was no disinterested student. Rather, he betrayed the nearly desperate spirit of a scholar who — one of my colleagues noted — was writing his books on world religions “as a drowning man looking for something — anything — to grab onto.” He frantically searched — that same colleague said he ransacked — the religions of the world to find an appropriate ethic that would allow for an active affirmation of life. The result of his academic and personal search was *Christianity and the Religions of the World, Indian*

Thought and Its Development, and the still unpublished *Chinese Thought and Its Development*. Schweitzer examined and evaluated, in addition to Christianity, ancient Mediterranean religions and Asian religions. I find it unfortunate that he did not pay any particular attention to the African religions around him, just as he did not learn an African language or study African music. Among the world religions that he did study, he appreciated features of many of them, particularly ancient Stoicism, Chinese religions, and aspects of Indian religions.

Schweitzer was especially fascinated with the ethical piety of Lao-tse and Meng-tse, among others, from China. In *Indian Thought and Its Development* Schweitzer cites several Chinese maxims and stories that are indicative of the ethical stance of active compassion that he found so attractive in Chinese sources, such as “Have a pitiful heart for all creatures”; “One must bring no sorrow even upon worms and plants and trees”; “One does evil who shoots birds, hunts animals, digs up the larvae of insects, frightens nesting birds”; and “Do not allow your children to amuse themselves by playing with flies or butterflies or little birds. It is not merely that such proceedings may result in damage to living creatures: they awaken in young hearts the inclination to cruelty and murder.” Such statements of ethical wisdom are reminiscent of Schweitzer’s own statements, stories, and actions having to do with birds, worms, and insects — recall Schweitzer’s ants. (Could Schweitzer have carried these Chinese maxims into his own writing and his own life?) Compare also the following story about the wife of a Chinese soldier. She was, it is said, ill and near death: “As a remedy she was ordered to eat the brains of a hundred sparrows. When she saw the birds in a cage, she sighed and said, ‘Shall it come to pass that to cure me a hundred living creatures shall be slain? I will rather die than allow that suffering shall come to them.’ She opened the cage and let them fly. Shortly after, she recovered from her illness.”

Schweitzer at times returned to a conviction that Christianity, and particularly the gospel of Jesus, may represent the best articulation of a living spirituality and of reverence for life. He once wrote, “Christianity alone is ethical mysticism,” whereas the union with the divine found in Eastern religions represents a less active form of personal spirituality. Schweitzer was not appreciative of the renunciation of the world, of life, and of action that he considered (rather unfairly) characteristic of Indian religions. Nonetheless, I am convinced, with Ara Paul Barsam, that Schweitzer was deeply influenced by religious expressions from China and India. An Indian ethical principle that seems to have made a significant impression upon Schweitzer was that of *ahimsa*, nonviolence or noninjury, as preached and practiced among Jains and others. Jainism was established in the sixth century B.C.E. by Mahavira, a reformer of Hinduism. The Jains

believe that the universe is alive with suffering souls and agonizing lives: a person is hurt, an insect is crushed, a tree is cut, a stone is kicked — in our infinite cycle of births and deaths and rebirths, *samsara*, our souls have known indescribable pains. Since our human lives are bound together with the existence of all other beings in the world, Mahavira affirmed, “One who neglects or disregards the existence of earth, air, fire, water, and vegetation disregards his own existence which is entwined with them.” To live rightly and well in this sort of world requires that we repudiate all the violence and the killing that can increase the stain of *karma* (the causality that shapes our destiny and determines the character of birth and rebirth). Thus, the Jain Sutras proclaim, “All things breathing, all things existing, all things living, all beings whatever, should not be slain or treated with violence, or insulted, or tortured, or driven away.” A deep commitment to a life of *ahimsa* may be seen in the everyday practices of observant Jains. Jains ordinarily observe a strict vegetarian diet, and even the vegetables — which are, after all, living things to be killed or eaten — are evaluated for their karmic weight. Jains advocate that kindness and consideration be shown to animals, and they support programs for the prevention of cruelty to animals. Some Jains even wear masks to prevent the inadvertent slaughter of tiny insects that otherwise might be killed as people breathe in and out; some sweep the surface of the ground ahead of them lest they trample living things. Such radically nonviolent practices, extreme as they sometimes are, illustrate a lifestyle that is mindful of the precariousness of life all around and the need to exercise care and gentleness in the presence of other living things. Jains compare this restrained and gentle life to that of “the bee [that] sucks honey in the blossoms of a tree without hurting the blossom and strengthens itself.”

In his evaluation of *ahimsa*, Schweitzer admitted that the proclamation of *ahimsa* is of great importance in the development of ethical thought. “The laying down of the commandment not to kill and not to damage is one of the greatest events in the spiritual history of humanity,” Schweitzer announced in *Indian Thought*. “Starting from its principle, founded on world and life denial, of abstention from action, ancient Indian thought — and this in a period when in other respects ethics has not progressed very far — reaches the tremendous discovery that ethics knows no bounds! So far as we know, this is for the first time clearly expressed by Jainism.” Schweitzer goes on to praise Buddha (with qualifications) for making this ethic of nonviolence an ethic of compassion, and he lauds Gandhi for transforming *ahimsa* into a principle of active compassion and affirmation of life — an ethic comparable, as Gandhi also recognized, to the ethic of Jesus as enunciated in the Sermon on the Mount.

Schweitzer's affirmation of reverence for life compares well, in several respects, with the ethic of *ahimsa* of Jains and others. If *ahimsa* is an all-encompassing ethical principle that fundamentally shapes the nonviolent lives and commitments of Jains and others, so does reverence for life for Schweitzer. If *ahimsa* embraces the value of all life — humans, animals, and plants — and proclaims solidarity among humans and all living things, so does reverence for life for Schweitzer. Schweitzer goes so far, in his *Philosophy of Civilization*, as to see, with Schopenhauer, a will to live not only in humans, animals, and plants, but even in crystals. (In his first sermon on reverence for life, in 1919, Schweitzer also notes how the snowflake, with its delicate and intricate pattern, melts and dies in one's hand: "The flake, which fell upon your hand from infinite space, which glistened there, quivered, and died — that is you. Wherever you see life — that is you!") And if *ahimsa* implies something of a gloomy, pessimistic assessment of life in the world — we cannot, finally, avoid the taking of life — so may the ethic of reverence for life for Schweitzer. Mike W. Martin notes the guilt-mongering of Schweitzer and prefers to employ the concept of responsibility — a concept that Schweitzer also embraces. James Brabazon reminds us that we might equally well speak of debt rather than guilt. Schweitzer says that since we cannot avoid destroying and injuring life, we necessarily incur guilt or indebtedness. He writes, "Ethics is responsibility without limit toward all that lives" — and then a few pages later he adds, "The good conscience is an invention of the devil."

It is not entirely surprising, after all, to remember what Schweitzer told Charles Joy about the origin of the idea of reverence for life: "The idea of reverence for life came to me as an unexpected discovery, like an illumination coming upon me in the midst of intense thought while I was completely conscious. And when the idea and the words had come to me, it was of Buddha I thought."

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Fourth, Schweitzer affirmed reverence for life philosophically. In his correspondence with his soon-to-be wife H el ene, Schweitzer acknowledged that he was essentially a philosopher, though a philosopher who was captured by Jesus. ("Basically I am philosopher — but I let myself be caught by him, the greatest, the most divine of all philosophers, in whom the most sublime thought leads back to the most simple. Because of this obedience he will forgive my heresies.") In his correspondence with Oskar Kraus, Schweitzer explained that in his philosophical writings he employed exclusively the language of philosophy and logical thinking, and thus referred to

“the universal will-to-live” rather than “God.” Schweitzer’s most complete and arguably most compelling discussion of reverence for life is given in his philosophical writings, specifically in *The Philosophy of Civilization*. There he considers Descartes’s starting point for philosophical discourse, the dictum *cogito ergo sum*, and pronounces it paltry and arbitrary. Instead, Schweitzer suggests that true philosophy begins with another sort of immediate awareness, in which each of us lives and moves, he claims, day by day. Like Arthur Schopenhauer, as well as Friedrich Nietzsche, Schweitzer proposes the primacy of the will, but he puts a very different spin on the place of the will. He writes that true philosophy or true ethics begins with an awareness and affirmation of the will to live: “I am life which wills to live, in the midst of life which wills to live.” From this awareness Schweitzer derives disarmingly simple and straightforward definitions of ethics, of moral goodness, and of evil: “Ethics consists, therefore, in my experiencing the compulsion to show to all will-to-live the same reverence as I do to my own.” And, as for good and evil: “It is good to maintain and to encourage life; it is bad to destroy life or to obstruct it.” Schweitzer never allows these descriptions of good and evil to degenerate into either relativism or legalism. Reverence for life remains absolute, to be sure, and all of life is sacred to the truly ethical person. But the application of reverence for life in concrete situations, in which we inevitably must make hard decisions that will sometimes — but only when necessary — destroy and obstruct life, requires the application of thoughtful reflection and ethical responsibility. Hence, as we have seen, Schweitzer’s assertions about the need for clear thinking and a sensitive conscience.

Schweitzer’s belief that all of life is sacred is a belief rooted in his metaphysics, Mike Martin suggests, and this belief leads Schweitzer to the formal conviction that killing any life form is reprehensible. While this conviction is a refreshing departure from self-serving attempts to minimize the value of so-called “lower” life forms, his reluctance to rank the relative value of different forms of life may present us with an ethical challenge. Killing life forms may be reprehensible, but is the killing of all life forms equally reprehensible? Are all life forms of equal value? Martin objects to Schweitzer’s reluctance to rank life forms, and he considers Schweitzer’s ethic to be arbitrary in this regard.

Of course, Schweitzer himself made practical decisions, as a medical doctor and ethical person, which may imply an informal ranking of values. He acknowledges that he is a mass-murderer of bacteria, so that he and his patients may live. He kills fish, so that young or wounded birds may be fed — compare *The Story of My Pelican*. The crucial matter, Schweitzer claims, is that there be

clear thinking and ethical reflection, in individual cases.

In a letter from Africa, Schweitzer reflects upon this important ethical issue: “I have just killed a mosquito that was buzzing around me in the lamplight. In Europe, I wouldn’t kill it even if it were bothering me, but here, where mosquitoes spread the most dangerous form of malaria, I take the liberty of killing them, although I don’t like doing it. The important thing is for all of us properly to mull over the question of when damaging and killing are permissible Much will be achieved once people become reflective and wisely realize that they should damage and kill only when necessary. That is the essence.” In this letter, Schweitzer gives another example of such decision-making — four injured pelicans who need to be fed fish in order to live — and he writes, “I always pity the poor fish to the depths of my soul, but I have to choose between killing the fish or the four pelicans who would surely starve to death.” The difficulty of this choice leads Schweitzer to conclude, “I do not know whether I am doing the right thing in deciding one way instead of the other.” Killing, after all, is always regrettable.

Schweitzer maintained that this exposition of reverence for life discloses that reverence for life is a logical consequence or necessity of thought. James Brabazon is helpful in his discussion of what Schweitzer meant by “thought,” *denken*. When Schweitzer asserts that reverence for life is a necessity of thought, Brabazon explains, he is not referring only to intellectual argumentation and logical proof but also to other sorts of reflection: meditation, intuition, mystical reflection. Brabazon quotes Schweitzer approvingly in this regard: “If rational thought thinks itself out to a conclusion, it arrives at something non-rational which, nevertheless, is a necessity of thought.” In spite of the best efforts of Schweitzer and Brabazon, I still do not think a strong case is made for reverence for life as a necessity of thought. Schweitzer himself admits that “the world is a ghastly drama of will-to-live divided against itself,” that the world is, as we also recognize to our grief, a dog-eat-dog world or, for Schweitzer, a hippo-eat-hippo world. For this question, this issue, Schweitzer has no answer, and he calls the contrast between creative will and destructive will an enigma. Further, even if necessity of thought is not judged to be logical necessity, few thinkers other than committed Schweitzerians buy into the necessary relationship Schweitzer poses between rational and nonrational thought, nor do ethicists feel compelled to draw the same conclusion as Schweitzer. Reverence for life remains a powerful, appealing ethical option, but it does not appear to be a necessity of thought.

Nevertheless, it may be possible, in another way, to demonstrate a universalizing tendency in the principle of reverence for life. Foundational to reverence for life, I would submit,

is reciprocity, the recognition that it is right and proper to balance my expectations and actions for myself with my expectations and actions for others. Thus Jesus, speaking out of his Jewish tradition, advises, “So in everything, act toward others the way you want others to act toward you” (the golden rule, which sometimes is articulated in the negative as the so-called silver rule), and he commands, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (love that includes love for enemy, as Jesus states in the Sermon on the Mount). On February 16, 1919, Schweitzer preached his first sermon on reverence for life, and it was a sermon on love for neighbor and for God. God, Schweitzer proclaimed in that sermon, is infinite life, and hence love for God is love for all life. “Reverence for the infinity of life,” Schweitzer said, “means the removal of the strangeness, the restoration of shared experiences and of compassion and sympathy And reason discovers the connecting link between love for God and love for humanity: love for all creatures, reverence for all beings, a compassionate sharing of experiences with all of life, no matter how externally dissimilar to our own.” Such ethical rules of reciprocity are to be found all around the world among devotees of the religions of the world. Hinduism praises one who looks on neighbor as self. Buddhism announces a universal love for all beings, a love that overcomes the hatred of others. Confucianism proclaims, “Do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you.” The *Tao Te Ching* observes, “One who loves the world as one’s own body can be entrusted with the world.” With these affirmations we are close indeed to Schweitzer’s affirmation of reverence for life.

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In September 1915, Schweitzer says, he came up with the phrase “reverence for life” while passing through a herd of hippopotami on the Ogowe River, and thereafter he found a variety of ways to affirm reverence for life — autobiographically, exegetically, religiously, philosophically. But there is an additional way, perhaps the most important way, in which Schweitzer affirmed reverence for life. He did so daily, actively, in his life. He lived reverence for life. As a medical doctor for Africans and Europeans who were in need of medical attention, as the head of a village hospital that welcomed and nurtured people and animals, Schweitzer practiced reverence for life for half a century at Lambaréné and in the equatorial jungle around. For Schweitzer, reverence for life was a practical philosophy with “calluses on its hands.” Like Goethe in *Wilhelm Meister*, Schweitzer chose reverence as the category to explain life in the world, and like Goethe in *Faust*, Schweitzer considered the opening of the Gospel of John, “In the beginning was the word

(Greek, *logos*),” and understood it as “In the beginning was action.” Before going to Africa, Schweitzer promised to be quiet as a fish, and he maintained that his life was his argument. Schweitzer found reverence for life when he found Lambaréné and lived in Lambaréné.

It remains for us, then, to evaluate for ourselves these affirmations of reverence for life. I do not anticipate that many of us will emulate Schweitzer by encountering and entertaining our own family of ants, but what shall we do? How shall we understand the challenges of moral goodness, evil, and ethics in the world? How shall we see ourselves in the context of other living beings in the world? How shall we assume our responsibilities and act upon them in a world of painful and perplexing ambiguities? Finally, our consideration of Schweitzer’s understanding of reverence for life may become a call to us, not unlike the call that Schweitzer describes at the end of *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, the call to which he responded by going to live and work in Africa. This call has been issued, in different places and at different times, by Buddha, Mahavira, Jesus, and others, and in Schweitzer this call is a call to ethical action. How do we understand reverence for life? How shall we affirm life and reverence for life?

Albert Schweitzer affirmed reverence for life and lived out of this affirmation at Lambaréné, but he was no saint. His daughter Rhena Schweitzer Miller recalls his authoritarian traits, and Schweitzer himself describes and deplors his temper. Today we feel properly uncomfortable with his colonialist attitudes and his statements about “primitive people.” That he reflected the colonialist and paternalistic attitudes of his generation is no surprise, but that he was able to transcend, to an extent, some such attitudes is encouraging.

Schweitzer was no saint, but rather he was a sinner, just an ordinary person like the rest of us. But that fact might make his call to reverence for life more powerful, more human. It is not a call from one who is ethically superior to us but from one who is ethically similar to us. It is a call from one of us to the rest of us, and to himself, to consider our lives and the lives of our brothers and sisters among human beings, animals, and plants. Saints may be extolled and put on a shelf, and their words may be admired from a distance and ignored. The words of sinners, of thoughtful but ordinary folks, are more difficult to ignore. We may need to listen to the words of sinners — especially remarkable sinners, like Albert Schweitzer — and respond. We may need to seek and find our own Lambaréné.

This essay, originally presented as a meditation at an Albert Schweitzer conference held in 2001 on the campus of Chapman University, is reprinted, with a few modifications and with the permission of the publisher, Syracuse University Press, from Marvin Meyer and Kurt Bergel, eds., *Reverence for Life: The Ethics of Albert Schweitzer for the Twenty-First Century* (The Albert Schweitzer Library; Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 22-36. It has also been published, in the present form, in a volume I have edited, *Finding Lambaréné* (Orange, Calif.: Chapman University Albert Schweitzer Institute, 2007). On the themes presented in this essay, see also Ara Paul Barsam, *Reverence for Life* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Predrag Cicovacki, ed., *Albert Schweitzer's Ethical Vision: A Sourcebook* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Mike W. Martin, *Albert Schweitzer's Reverence for Life: Ethical Idealism and Self-Realization* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2007).

Frederick Franck, *Days with Albert Schweitzer: A Lambaréné Landscape* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1959).

Franck, *Days with Albert Schweitzer*, 110-12.

Albert Schweitzer, *Memoirs of Childhood and Youth*, trans. Kurt and Alice R. Bergel (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997).

Ibid., 37.

Ibid.

James Bentley, *Albert Schweitzer: The Enigma* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 1-19.

Cf. my review, "New Translation of *Memoirs of Childhood and Youth*," *Albert Schweitzer Institute Bulletin* (1997): 5, 7.

Today we might prefer to refer to this as the Matthean version and revision of the mission speech in the synoptic sayings source Q. Q (from the German *Quelle*, "source") is the source assumed by most scholars to have been used (along with Mark) by Matthew and Luke in the compilation of their gospels.

Albert Schweitzer, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God: The Secret of Jesus' Messiahship and Passion*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1985); *idem*, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. William Montgomery (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1968; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); *idem*, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, ed. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001). The 1968 English edition of *The Quest* is prefaced by the introduction of James M. Robinson.

James M. Robinson, introduction to *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1968 edition), xii. See also Robinson's essay, "The Legacy of Schweitzer's *Quest of the Historical Jesus*," in *Reverence for Life: The Ethics of Albert Schweitzer for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Kurt Bergel (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 246-55.

Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 370-71 (slightly modified for style).

Ibid., 403. The entire concluding paragraph reads as follows: "He comes to us as one unknown,

without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, he came to those people who knew him not. He speaks to us the same word, 'Follow me,' and sets us to the tasks which he has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey him, whether they be wise or simple, he will reveal himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in his fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience who he is" (slightly modified for style).

Ibid., 182.

Cf., for example, John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); Robert W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996).

See my translation of the Sermon on the Mount in *Reverence for Life*, ed. Meyer and Bergel, 256-68.

Albert Schweitzer, *Reverence for Life*, trans. Reginald H. Fuller (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 65 (slightly modified for style).

See Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 401; Ara Paul Barsam, "'Reverence for Life': Albert Schweitzer's Mystical Theology and Ethics" (Ph.D. thesis, Oxford University, 2001), 166-67.

See Henry Clark, *The Ethical Mysticism of Albert Schweitzer: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Schweitzer's Philosophy of Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), 88-89. Note also the discussion in Marvin Meyer, "Albert Schweitzer and the Image of Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas," in *Jesus Then and Now: Images of Jesus in History and Christology*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Charles Hughes (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2001), 72-90; and Ara Paul Barsam, "'Reverence for Life,'" 112-48. Barsam cites an important footnote Schweitzer included in *The Kingdom of God and Primitive Christianity* (ed. Ulrich Neuenschwander, trans. L. A. Garrard, New York: Seabury Press, 1968), 128, which indicates further developments in Schweitzer's reflections upon the historical Jesus: "In the section on the secret of suffering in my *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung* . . . , I still believed that in the pre-Messianic tribulation a load of guilt that encumbered the world and was delaying the coming of the kingdom could be expiated by believers, and that Jesus therefore, in accordance with the Servant passages, regarded his vicarious sacrifice as an atonement. As a result of further study of late Jewish eschatology and the thought of Jesus on his passion, I find that I can no longer endorse this view."

Albert Schweitzer, *Out of My Life and Thought: An Autobiography*, trans. Antje Bultmann Lemke (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 235.

Clark, *Ethical Mysticism*, 89 (slightly modified for style).

David L Dungan, "Reconsidering Albert Schweitzer," *The Christian Century* 92 (1975): 879.

Albert Schweitzer, *Christianity and the Religions of the World*, trans. Johanna Powers (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1939); idem, *Indian Thought and Its Development*, trans. by Mrs. Charles E. B. Russell (Boston: Beacon Press, 1936).

Schweitzer, *Indian Thought and Its Development*, 85.

Schweitzer, *Christianity and the Religions of the World*, 87.

See Ara Paul Barsam, "Albert Schweitzer, Jainism, and Reverence for Life," in *Reverence for Life*, ed. Meyer and Bergel, 207-45.

Cited in L. M. Singhvi, *The Jain Declaration on Nature* (Cincinnati: Federation of Jain Associations in North America, 1990), 7.

Sources of Indian Tradition, ed. William Theodore DeBary (Introduction to Oriental Civilizations; New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 61.

Cited in Singhvi, *The Jain Declaration on Nature*, 13.

Schweitzer, *Indian Thought and Its Development*, 82-83.

Albert Schweitzer, *The Philosophy of Civilization*, trans. C. T. Campion (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1987), 282.

Albert Schweitzer, *A Place for Revelation: Sermons on Reverence for Life*, ed. Lothar Stiehm and Martin Strege, trans. David Larrimore Holland (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co.; London: Collier Macmillan, 1988), 10.

See Mike W. Martin, "Rethinking Reverence for Life," in *Reverence for Life*, ed. Meyer and Bergel, 166-83.

See James Brabazon, *Albert Schweitzer: A Biography* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1975), 258. Brabazon has now published a second edition of his biography of Schweitzer (Albert Schweitzer Library; Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000).

Schweitzer, *The Philosophy of Civilization*, 311, 318.

Albert Schweitzer, *Goethe: Five Studies*, trans. Charles R. Joy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 18.

The Albert Schweitzer – Helene Bresslau Letters, 1902-1912, ed. Rhena Schweitzer Miller and Gustav Woytt, trans. Antje Bultmann Lemke (Albert Schweitzer Library; Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 51.

Cf. Brabazon, *Albert Schweitzer*, 303-04.

See Chapter 26 of Schweitzer, *The Philosophy of Civilization*, and other discussions of reverence for life in *Reverence for Life*, ed. Meyer and Bergel.

Schweitzer, *The Philosophy of Civilization*, 309.

Martin, "Rethinking Reverence for Life."

Albert Schweitzer, *The Story of My Pelican*, trans. Martha Wardenburg (London: Souvenir, 1964).

Schweitzer wrote this letter from Lambaréné to Jack Eisendraht in 1951; see Albert Schweitzer, *Letters, 1905-1965*, ed. Hans Walter Bähr, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1992), 218. Ara Paul Barsam also cites this letter; see "Albert Schweitzer, Jainism, and Reverence for Life," in *Reverence for Life*, ed. Meyer and Bergel, 236.

Brabazon, *Albert Schweitzer*, 246, citing Schweitzer, *Philosophy of Civilization*, 80.

Schweitzer, *Philosophy of Civilization*, 312.

Matthew 7:12 (Q); Luke 6:31 (Q); Gospel of Thomas, saying 6.

Mark 12:31; Matthew 22:39; Luke 10:27 (citing Leviticus 19:18); Gospel of Thomas, saying 25; Matthew 5:44 (Q); Luke 6:27 (Q).

Schweitzer, *A Place for Revelation*, 11.

Cf., for example, Robert O. Ballou, ed., *The Bible of the World* (New York: Viking Press, 1939).

See Alice Bergel, "Philosophy with 'Calluses on Its Hands,' " *Albert Schweitzer Institute Bulletin* (1997): 4, 6, reviewing Claus Günzler, *Albert Schweitzer: Einführung in sein Denken* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1996).

Cf. Schweitzer, *Goethe: Five Studies*, 51.

THE PLACE OF ETHICS IN WESTERN CIVILIZATION AND CULTURE

A conversation between two Friends high up in the Swiss mountains

By Percy Mark

It was mid-January. My wife and I were spending a few weeks in the Bernese Oberland, in the small town of Zweisimmen, where my wife's brother and sister live.

Skiing conditions were good and, Klaus, my brother-in-law having just retired from being a sixth-form teacher, had the time to accompany me on the slopes. At the age of 72 I was no longer the fastest skier on the pistes, nor was I interested in any black runs, but skiing is still my most favourite sport. Klaus, aged 65, was much fitter and faster than I, but ambition for speed and daring were no longer his main concerns either. So we had a good time together enjoying the floating feeling of gliding gently through the powder snow and perfecting our style in making turns with the minimum of effort.

Lunch on the mountain is by no means the least of the attractions to be found in this way of life. On this occasion we had chosen the restaurant high up on the Saanersloch to have our frankfurters and chips and enjoy the glorious sunshine on the terrace, with panoramic views all around.

We chatted about the wonderful snow-conditions, the lack of "crowds" after the New Year stampede, the amazing weather and of course the fantastic views, with Klaus explaining the various mountain ranges and peaks, - as you do when you're high up in Switzerland - even if you're an Austrian!

After a little pause whilst munching our chips, I started the conversation again:

P "May I ask you something completely different?"

K "Of course"

P "Could you describe for me what the words 'Culture' and 'Civilization' mean to you? Do they mean more or less the same thing?"

K “No, I don’t think of them as being the same. Under ‘Culture’ I would include music, painting, sculpture, - all the major arts, - like literature, theatre, opera, also films and the like. Until a short while ago I thought that only the classical arts and music were included, but I had to give up this narrow interpretation when our government offered financial support in the form of grants to encourage our cultural life; - because then jazz-groups and pop-groups came forward, - alpine folk-singers and yodeling groups and all sorts of activities which had to be accepted as ‘cultural pursuits’. Mind you, one does have to ask oneself nowadays, how far you can take that. Anyway, that is **our** culture. Other peoples have other cultures. History shows that there were periods of ‘high cultural achievements’ and then again ‘cultural low-points’ with very little that has been handed down.

Civilization is more difficult to define, and there is a real danger of being biased: but anyway, crudely expressed, we are civilized in comparison to a bushman in Africa. Here it is more a question of the organization of society, its institutions, laws and traditions, its technical and scientific achievements, its works of craft and architectural merit. Here too, history has examples of high civilizations like those of ancient Egypt and Greece, or the Mayas and Incas of South America or the ancient Chinese”.

I interrupted:

P “This is most helpful, -many thanks. Now I will tell you why I asked the question. You know that I have immersed myself deeply in the legacy of Albert Schweitzer. We know that from the age of 25 onwards, he was convinced that western civilization is in decline if not in a state of terminal disintegration. And I am trying to correctly understand and evaluate this view of his: - I mean, - to find out, when this decline began, when in his view our civilization was at its height and what it is that is being lost in the decline”.

K “Well, in my career, especially as a 6th form teacher, I have experienced very clearly what is being lost. I can certainly give you an example of that! You know that it has always been a great concern of mine to incorporate as much cultural content into my classroom activities as possible. We did a lot of play-acting and of course a lot of music, we made extensive trips to France, Italy and Holland to see their architecture and their art, and we made frequent visits to museums and art galleries. I always tried to provide maximum opportunity for my pupils to have varied cultural experiences, - and that was completely incorporated into the curriculum. This has

all been stopped. The curriculum now prescribed has changed priorities to such an extent, that such things are no longer possible. There you have one example anyway.”

P “It’s hardly credible, that this has happened here in Switzerland as well as in England. My daughter who is a primary school teacher as you know, has a very similar story to tell, and we thought that this only applied to the UK. It’s an excellent example.

But may I go back to Schweitzer, - because the crux of what I am working on has to do with ethics. As a result of my repeated reading of some of Schweitzer’s books I was under the impression, that ethics are an essential part of what is considered to be true Culture and Civilization, and I have assumed that this is generally accepted. I was therefore most surprised when, during conversations with my sister and her husband in Vienna last November, it became clear, that this is not at all so. They like to quickly consult the dictionary in such conversations and that conclusively proved me wrong. And now you have clearly confirmed that for me too: In the generally accepted definition of these two words, ethics does not get a mention. Of course I then immediately checked this out in the Oxford dictionary when I got back to England and found it confirmed again.”

K “I do believe that is so, -but of course I haven’t got access to a dictionary up here on the mountain. Ethics are not something many people talk about these days; - but perhaps it is coming more into focus again now, - I mean in connection with the concerns about the environment, the protection of nature, climate change and all that.”

P “Well, for me that doesn’t necessarily have anything to do with ethics. If we begin to realize that we are endangering our habitat, and may be even our existence, and we start to worry about that, then this is initially only the instinct of self-preservation kicking in and has nothing to do with ethics. It would only indicate, that we are realizing our stupidity and ignorance compared to the animal world, which would never destroy its living conditions, not knowingly anyway. In connection with the concept of “Civilization” this only shows that man as a creature has sunk in a certain kind of basic intelligence below that of the animal world and this would only re-enforce Schweitzer’s view of things. That mankind is beginning to take notice and worry about it, could perhaps be regarded as a turning point, - though not from the high plateau of incomparable achievement which scientists and economists would have us believe, but from a low ebb of

cultural and civilized behavior.

K “Whao, that is harsh! But I can see where you’re coming from.”

* * *

We had finished our frankfurters and chips, and Klaus got up to bring some coffee and the obligatory Swiss chocolate. We sat and admired the view and enjoyed the fragrance of the coffee for a little while.

Then Klaus asked:

K “Well now, what do you understand by ethics? What can you say about it? What did Schweitzer say about?”

I had to gather my thoughts in response to such a direct question. Eventually I answered:

P “Schweitzer of course concerned himself very deeply with this question. He studied all the great religions to which he had access, in order to find out to what extent they embodied and encompassed ethical thinking within them. In the end he came back to Christianity as having - in spite of everything - the highest conception of the ethical.”

K “And that is... ?”

P “He refers only to the direct sayings of Jesus which have been handed down: ‘love thy neighbour as thyself’, - ‘love thine enemies’, - ‘if someone strikes your right cheek, offer him your left also’, etc, -it is these statements he claims are the highest expression of ethical thought.”

K “And the 10 Commandments?”

P “Jesus of course lived in a jewish community in which the 10 Commandments were common knowledge; but he spoke only of two: ‘Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.....’ and ‘Love thy neighbour as thyself’. If you can keep these two, you won’t transgress against any of the 10, which are more like social rules and guidelines, - points of support for those who can’t cope with the two which Jesus proclaimed. Schweitzer always refused to set up such rules and guidelines about his ‘Reverence for Life’. He repeatedly came under pressure to do so in respect of vegetarianism, vivisection, animal experiments etc. People wanted him to say something categorical about these things, but he always avoided it; - only in the area of animal sports such as bull-fighting and the like could he not contain himself and he condemned these outright.

For him it was always a question of an individual decision in a specific situation, - a question of the individual conscience as the only relevant authority. And I think that in this he was a follower of Jesus - and that this is the truth about ethics”

K “That makes a lot of sense to me”.

P “ There was something else that was very important to Schweitzer: he was looking for an ethic that was compatible with a life-affirming view of the world. Nearly all ethical concepts which he found in the great religions seemed to him to go hand in hand with a life-negating world-view; a view in which the ‘World’ was regarded as evil, - to be shunned and from which to escape. Monastic life and hermitages in Europe and the life in ashrams and the retreats to the forest in the East are all examples of this way of life. For him the ethic which he sought for the future of humanity would have to cope with daily life in the market-place, - would have to stand its ground in the rough and tumble of life, and conversely, the life of society would have to be in harmony with the ethical conception and accept it as its basis.”

K “And he found such an ethic within Christianity?”

P “More as a possibility than in reality. It was exactly this, that he experienced as the great disappointment of western, - christian - civilization: that until now the realization of this possibility has left so much to be desired and that the 19th and 20th centuries moved further and further away from such a realization. He found beginnings of such ethical thinking with Zoroaster in the Middle East and with the ancient Chinese thinkers. In India he found both Buddhism and Hinduism to be too life-negating. Amongst European thinkers he mentions the Gnostics, Spinoza, Hegel and Kant in this context, but I really don’t know enough about these. Have you read any of them?”

K “No, I’m afraid I haven’t.”

P “To understand Schweitzer properly I would actually have to read all these people.”

K “But that would be a huge task.”

P “And especially for me, since I am such a slow reader. One of my brothers in Vienna advised, that I should look these people up in an encyclopedia of philosophy. He thought that would suffice.”

K “And you don’t believe that it would?”

Once more I fell into a prolonged silence. It was wonderfully quiet up here and conducive to 'just sitting'.

* * *

Eventually I replied:

P "You know, it seems to me in this conversation, thinking about this question, that Schweitzer challenged humanity to conceive and imagine a culture and a civilization in which ethical thought is a fundamental ingredient. This challenge is perhaps his truly original contribution, and a fundamentally new concept for the West. If amongst these philosophers he found first indications and beginnings of this, it is most unlikely, that historians and the writers of encyclopedia would have found and recognized these and therefore they are unlikely to be included in their summaries."

K "You might well be right about that. Then you will have to read the originals yourself. I wish you luck!" But what do you mean by 'his truly original contribution'?"

P "I mean the concept of a culture and civilization based on ethical thought!

As you have perfectly illustrated: in the general usage of these two words, ethics has no part to play. But I have to say, that in my view this is not true for the East. Unfortunately, the East is hell-bent on copying the West! - not the other way round; - a further indication of civilization in decline - globally!"

K "Yes, I wanted to say: what about Buddhism, - for a Buddhist this is surely quite familiar territory?"

P "Absolutely! Anyway, for me Schweitzer has not evaluated the Indians quite correctly, although he studied them and wrote a lot about them. Perhaps he only had limited access to their written material and maybe he did not have anyone who knew the Indian religions thoroughly from personal experience. He could read Latin and Greek, I think, and maybe even Hebrew, but not Sanskrit and only very little English. You know that I have immersed myself pretty thoroughly in Indian thought and know that for them Schweitzer's 'Reverence for Life' is something many of them take for granted, - certainly the Buddhists do, and the Hindus have a much stronger life-affirmation than Schweitzer gave them credit for."

K "Is that not also true for the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas? Their reverence for

Nature and natural forces and their love of Mother Earth is only now becoming accessible for us through recently published books and stories.”

P “That is so true!”

xoxoxoxoxox

We again had fallen silent, letting our gaze rest on the shining white mountain-range opposite, where delicately transparent plumes of mist were chasing like living veils over the ridges and peaks, glowing luminously in the afternoon sun. Klaus explained that this was the effect of the southerly winds coming up from Italy.

I began again:

P “Yes, - globalization! Perhaps there are some good aspect to it after all!”

K “How do you mean?”

P “That we now have access to so much information from all corners of the earth.”

K “But whether that is a good thing is still debatable. Whether we will cope with all that wealth of information and know what to do with it? Is it not likely, that we will be inhibited in our own creative action and our own independent thinking? You know what it’s like when your desk is piled high with papers and innumerable suggestive brochures, and you can’t decide where to start.”

And Klaus added after a little pause, - with a deep sigh:

“You know, it is so wonderful to be able to sit up here together and have such a conversation!”

P “Yes truly!” I responded in a whisper.

K “As you know, I am very happy with the tasks which occupy me now at the beginning of my retirement: the music with the choir, the planned trips to places of cultural interest like the one to Andalucia in March with a coach full of people, and of course my new role as grandfather. As ever, it is still my deep interest to open up opportunities for people to visit cultural centers and have experiences of our own and other cultures which they couldn’t otherwise have. But my desk is a bit, - well, as I said - piled high with stacks of papers, and the telephone and e-mails are constantly on the go with fixing dates and venues and making all sorts of arrangements. In all this,

to have a conversation like the one we are having, which opens up distant horizons for the mind and touches ideas and thoughts for which normally there never is time, is something very special. And that is something very refreshing up here in the silence. From now on I will always have to think of this moment when I am up here.”

P “Yes, it is a great present, - and there is something of grace about it, - to be able to spend a few hours in the exchange of deeper thoughts without haste and the usual pressure of time. For me, moments of silence and the contemplation of fundamental ideas has become a vital necessity. There was a time when I nearly lost it altogether for lack of access to this world of quiet and deeper contemplation. That was soon after your sister and I started our life together in London. She didn’t notice much of the state I was in at the time. She needed all her strength and concentration to forge a life for herself, and for us together, in a totally strange country with a language she could as yet not speak and where she did not know anybody. That took enormous courage and all her energy. But for me, - after my time with Schweitzer and the whole African experience, I found myself back in London with the task of starting and maintaining a family, - and I found life in the huge metropolis utterly senseless and mad and I was barely coping.”

K “I can understand that, - but what did you do?”

P “A friend rescued me. You know him, James, - he came to stay with you once up here in Zweisimmen.”

K “Yes of course, I remember him”

P “We met in London from time to time. On one such occasion he noticed that things were difficult for me. So he invited me to take part in a course, where he was in charge of a beginners class at that time. It was a course for the study of normal psychology. I took him up on the offer and started going there. Later your sister started there too. Eventually we were taught to meditate and my inner life found nourishment once more. I got started on a path on which it is no longer imaginable for me in this life not to go forward, - albeit there are ever only the immediate next step ahead to be seen.

The wispy strands of mist falling over the distant ridges coalesced into clouds and rose into the sky. A dense haze began to draw across the sun and it became cold instantly. We two friends got up, hugged each other and skied down the mountain, gliding smoothly through the wonderful powder-snow on the way home.



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