

Albert Schweitzer's Ways of Peacemaking

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In the case of a great peacemaker, what matters the most is not what this individual has done for others, but what others have done because of him or her. This insight certainly applies to Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965). Yet to understand the great influence that Schweitzer exerted on others, we need to remember the example he provided for them. One trademark of Schweitzer was his insistence that his life is his argument: his theory and his practice were one. To get a better grasp of this unity, which Schweitzer considered indispensable for peacemaking, I will first present his theory of reverence for life, as manifested in his attitude toward the Cold War and the nuclear arms race. I will then look at how Schweitzer lived his reverence for life in a jungle of the equatorial Africa, where he opened a hospital in 1913 and worked there until his death. At the end of this essay I will show that Schweitzer's medical and humanitarian work reflected his conviction that the roots of our contemporary crisis are spiritual and moral, not political or economic. Consequently, he believed that the ideal of perpetual peace can be approximated only by developing the spirituality and morality of every individual.

I. Against War and Nuclear Weapons

Disillusioned with the so-called "continuous and unstoppable progress" of western civilization, Schweitzer wrote at the end of WWI:

We believed once in the victory of truth; but we do not now. We believed in our fellow-men; we do not now. We believed in justice; we do not now. We trusted in the power of kindness and peaceableness; we do not now. We were

capable of enthusiasm; but we are not so now.... [W]e ourselves are in a decline.¹

To account for this decline of our civilization and to outline its possible restoration, Schweitzer wrote his *Philosophy of Civilization*, the highest point of which is compressed in one phrase: *reverence for life*.² By using this phrase, Schweitzer wanted to make three points. First, this phrase captures the most basic insight about ourselves and our relationship to others: I am life which wants to live, and all around me is life that wants to live. The will to live is indubitable. This, and not Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*, is the most elementary consciousness we establish about ourselves and others. Second, reverence for life is the appreciation of what may be called the greatest mystery of the universe—life. We everywhere experience life as different from ourselves in external appearance, yet inwardly recognize that it is the same life, driven by the same desire to live. Reverence for life is the recognition of the fundamental similarity of all life, which removes the detachment between our lives and the life of any other living creature. Third, our recognition of the universal desire to live is not a mere instinct (or a will to power, as Nietzsche argued), but a cornerstone of our ethical and spiritual orientation. For Schweitzer, good consists in preserving life, in enhancing it, and in wishing to raise it to its highest potential. Evil, by contrast, consists in the destruction of life, in the injury to life, or in the obstruction of its development. Schweitzer believed that the insight that I am life which wants to live, and all around me is life that wants to live, imposes on us a moral and spiritual obligation to treat every other being not only with dignity, but—following the example of Jesus—lovingly as well.

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By “reverence for life” Schweitzer meant reverence for *every* life; for the sake of the argument, we will focus here on reverence for *human* life. War and violence stand opposed to such reverence for life and our active engagement to respect and love others. War would not be possible without the presumption that some lives are more valuable than others and, more specifically, that the lives of a selected group of people which we favor are more valuable than the lives of our enemies. In Schweitzer’s words,

The awareness that we are all human beings has become lost in war and politics. We have reached the point of regarding each other only as members of a people either allied with us or against us and our approach—prejudice, sympathy, or antipathy—are all conditioned by that. Now we must rediscover the fact that we—all together—are human beings, and that we must strive to concede to each other what moral capacity we have.³

A similar assumption lies also behind the use of violence: I am justified in being violent against other human beings because I am defending somebody or affirming something which is of higher value than the lives (or the dignity, or the rights) of those against whom I resort to violence. This value need not be and usually is not understood as absolute. It is a relative and subjective value—it is relative to *my* (or *our*) point of view. Schweitzer argued that, objectively speaking, war is evil because it violates the dignity of human life. For the same reason, he opposed every racist, sexist or any similar kind of discrimination. The value of life—all life—is not relative but absolute. In Kant’s terminology, the imperative to respect life is not hypothetical but categorical. In religious terms, every life is sacred.

Schweitzer’s opposition to war was even more vocal during the Cold War than during WWI and WWII. He did not consider the periods after WWI and WWII as the periods of peace. The lack of military conflicts is only a negative criterion of peace. A positive criterion must also take into account a genuine desire to respect and enhance a peaceful coexistence of all nations and all human beings. The periods after both wars were characterized, by contrast, by an open display of economic greed and a reprehensible exertion of political influence. What was even worse, the years after the end of WWII led

to an intense arms race, especially with regard to the development and proliferation of nuclear weapons. During the Cold War, several countries had performed numerous nuclear tests: the US: 1,050, Russia: between 715 and 969, France: 210, Great Britain: 45, China: 45. The first nuclear bomb tested (“Trinity,” by the US, on July 16, 1945) was 19 kilotons, while the strongest and largest thermonuclear weapon ever tested (“Tsar Bomba,” by the Soviet Union, on October 31, 1961) was 50,000 kilotons—more than 2,500 times stronger than “Trinity” and the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s, Schweitzer led a campaign against nuclear testing and demanded the renunciation of all nuclear weapons. He wrote open letters to Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy, as well as to the Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev. Their false promises, the manipulation of the UN, the deception of their own and the international public with regard to the danger of nuclear weapons, and their lack of concern for the future fate of humanity brought numerous disappointments to Schweitzer. In the first of the three appeals radio-broadcasted from Oslo, Norway, in 1958, Schweitzer publicly expressed his outrage at the lack of moral and political responsibility of the so-called “world leaders”:

It is strange that so far nobody has stressed that the question of whether nuclear tests should be stopped or continued is not one which concerns the nuclear powers extensively. Who is giving these countries the right to experiment . . . with weapons involving the most serious risks for the whole world?⁴

In his private correspondence Schweitzer voiced his fury even more vividly: the governments “constitute the greatest danger for mankind.”⁵

In his radio appeal Schweitzer mentioned a declaration-petition signed by 9,235 scientists of all nations and handed to the Secretary General of the United Nations on January 13, 1958. In this declaration the signed scientists pointed out:

[T]he radioactivity gradually created by nuclear tests represents a greater danger for all parts of the world and is particularly serious because its consequences will be an increasing number of deformed children in the future. For this reason they demanded an international

agreement putting an end to the nuclear tests.⁶

Schweitzer believed that this declaration “gave the reassurance propaganda its deathblow.” He was wrong. He was also wrong in believing that such a pressure would put an end to nuclear testing. It took several more decades and millions of more protestors before the nuclear testing could be slowed down. Schweitzer’s optimism, however, was only exaggerated, not misdirected.

If he were alive today, Schweitzer would continue to express his dissatisfaction not only at the newly emerging nuclear programs and the various mostly illegal nuclear trades (e.g., the recent US trade with India), but at the continuous hypocrisy of the nuclear powers. While they condemn Iran and North Korea for developing nuclear capabilities, the nuclear powers do not even attempt to eliminate their own enormous nuclear arsenals. Although the present number of nuclear warheads is less than in the high-days of the Cold War, their number is still mind-boggling: the US possesses around 16,000 nuclear warheads, Russia 10,350, China 400, France 350, Great Britain 200, Israel 200, Pakistan 40, India 35, and North Korea between 6 and 8.⁸

Since 1995, there has been a ban on further testing of nuclear weapons, which Schweitzer worked so hard to implement during his lifetime. This ban also commits the nuclear powers to a gradual but complete disarmament. Yet, like so many other international treaties, the ban is invoked only when the “undesirable others” violate it. The members of the nuclear club continue with “sub-critical testing,” which consists in using less fissile material than the critical mass needed for a self-sustained nuclear fission reaction.⁹ What is more, when the members of the nuclear club feel as powerful as the US does, they also continue with secret testing of new kinds of nuclear devices and do not hesitate to announce publicly that they may expand conventional warfare by the limited use of highly specialized nuclear bombs which have the capability of penetrating deep in-ground bunkers. The US also stubbornly continues to develop its so-called “Ballistic Missile Defense” (BMD), which is not primarily a defensive system at all, but is intended as an offensive weapon; as a Rand Corporation study affirms: BMD “is not simply a *shield* but an *enabler* of U.S. action.”¹⁰

If he were alive, Schweitzer would undoubtedly continue his fight for a complete ban of all nuclear testing and a complete dismantling

of all nuclear weapons. The threat does not consist merely in annihilation of all life on this planet. It also involves the risk of ruining all cultural, moral, and spiritual accomplishments of humanity. In Schweitzer’s words: “Atomic weapons are not only a sin; they are also a desecration.”¹¹

Schweitzer was right to suspect the manipulations of the governments of the nuclear countries, without even having sufficient knowledge of all relevant facts. Only many years later have we been allowed to get a better grasp of the desecration that was going on in the fifties and the sixties:

Minutes before the first light of dawn on January 27, 1951, an Air Force B-50 bomber banked left over the juniper and Joshua trees and dropped an atomic bomb on the desert west of Las Vegas. The flash of light awakened ranchers in northern Utah. The concussion shattered windows in Arizona. The radiation swept across America, contaminating the soils of Iowa and Indiana, the coastal bays of New England, and the snows of northern New York.

Thus began the most prodigiously reckless program of scientific experimentation in United States history. Over the next 12 years, the government’s nuclear cold warriors detonated 126 atomic bombs into the atmosphere at the 1,350-square-mile Nevada Test Site. Each of the pink clouds that drifted across the flat mesas and forbidden valleys of the atomic proving grounds contained levels of radiation comparable to the amount released after the explosion in 1986 of the Soviet nuclear reactor at Chernobyl.

The Soviet Union was condemned by the United States from keeping the Chernobyl disaster secret for three days and preventing Ukrainians and Europeans from taking measures to protect themselves from radiation. In contrast, the leaders of the American nuclear weapons industry waged a secret medical and scientific struggle for 30 years to cover up the contamination of vast areas of North America from atomic blasts at the Nevada Test Site.

The secret is now [in 1993] public because during the last 14 years formerly classified documents about the atomic testing program were revealed in Feder-

al courts, Congress, and the press. The records disclose a story of cold calculation and doggedly irresponsible behavior by the government's top nuclear scientists and engineers that is difficult, even in this era of national cynicism, to fully comprehend.¹²

II. A Doctor and a Humanitarian

With intellectuals like Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein, Schweitzer engaged in an active campaign against nuclear weapons. Yet this was not his central preoccupation. Schweitzer's life was centered on his jungle hospital. As he explained to one of his visitors, "This is what I mean when I say I came to Lambaréné because I wanted my life to be my argument. I didn't want my ideas to become an end in themselves." On another occasion, he clarified his thoughts to the same guest: "In the morning, when the sun is up and I hear the cries of the hospital, I do not think of these lofty ideas."¹³ For the development of his "lofty ideas," i.e., the work on his writings and his correspondence, Schweitzer needed to wait for the night hours, when the hospital was asleep. During the day, it was urgent to attend patients. The equatorial Africa was in desperate need of doctors and medical supplies. This whole continent, in Schweitzer's time as in ours, was the least developed and in need of more help than any other part of the globe. According to one vivid description,

At the time [Schweitzer] arrived there, he was the only medical doctor in a thousand-square-mile area between the Congo and the Gold Coast, in malaria-infested West Equatorial Africa, serving a few miles south of the equator in the world's most uncomfortable tropical climate. It was from this area in West Africa that most of the slave sold into bondage in the New World had been shipped. Liberville, in the Gulf of Guinea, was named after those liberated slaves returned by the English and French men-of-war. Unfortunately, their campaign was a losing battle against slave traders in the early nineteenth century. Schweitzer knew this local history, and it reinforced his commitments to devote himself ... to Africa and the reparations he felt the white man owed the black.¹⁴

When, as a young but already accomplished man, Schweitzer learned about the desperate situation in Africa, he decided to abandon his musical and academic career, get a medical degree, and with his wife open a hospital in Lambaréné.¹⁵ Despite the endless work and the difficult living conditions, Africa became his home—Schweitzer died in Lambaréné and is buried there. He never regretted his decision. Even after receiving Nobel Prize for Peace (in 1952), Schweitzer believed that his practical work as a doctor and a humanist, rather than his appeals against nuclear weapons, was his most lasting contribution to peacemaking. He refused to accept as peaceful the state of affairs in which Africa found itself—although there were no major military conflicts, the colonization has created a physical and spiritual devastation of the continent. If people live in pain, if they are dying of starvation, this should not be called peace. Schweitzer often expressed this idea by speaking of the "brotherhood of those who bear the mark of pain," which is yet another, concrete manifestation of his reverence for life and his peacemaking.¹⁶

There are two related points which Schweitzer wanted to make with regard to this specific form of peacemaking. The first is that we should avoid the thought that what one individual can contribute is always limited and can never alleviate the entire problem. No single doctor and no single hospital can ease the pain and anguish of the millions of people. Nonetheless, insisted Schweitzer, "A single doctor in Africa, even with the most modest equipment, can mean very much for very many. The good which he can accomplish surpasses a hundred-fold what he gives of his own life and the cost of material support he must have."¹⁷ The important thing is to affirm life and act—not in a sense of charity, but in the sense of justice; not because the final results may be predicted or accomplished, but because an individual should do what is right, regardless of the consequences. As he explained to a visiting American journalist,

It's not enough merely to exist. It's not enough to say 'I'm earning enough to live and support my family. I do my work well. I'm a good father. I'm a good husband. I'm a good churchgoer.' That's all very well, but we must do something more. Seek always to do some good somewhere. Every man has to seek his own way to make his own

self more noble. . . . You must give something to your fellowman. Even if it's a little thing, do something for those who have a need of a man's help, something for which you get no pay but the privilege of doing it.¹⁸

As they were departing, and thinking of his African patients, Schweitzer added: "Remember, you don't live in a world all your own. Your brothers are here too."

The second point on which Schweitzer insisted was that help cannot be limited to the alleviation of pain and anguish, but should lead to a more holistic type of attention. Although primarily a healing ground for a variety of diseases, the hospital was also a place for education and cultivation which was to have a transformative effect on the lives of the natives. Schweitzer allowed his patients to come and stay in the hospital with their family members, in some cases even with their pet animals. The site of the hospital became thereby a place of communal living, in which the doctors and nurses were trying to teach everyone present about hygiene, healthy food, and healthy life-style. Every evening Schweitzer practiced music in the open, and every Sunday morning he delivered a sermon for all. Reverence for life and peacekeeping are not an efficient tactic in the world bent on violence, but a principal orientation of how to live one's life. To create a better world, we need to change how people live and what they value. Reverence for life is a spiritual attitude which increases our responsiveness toward all living beings, the attitude which changes how we see ourselves, other human beings, and the world as a whole.

Schweitzer's reverence for life does not imply that the greatest tragedy of life consists in experiencing pain, hunger, and death. "The real tragedy of life is in what dies inside a man while he lives – the death of genuine feeling, the death of inspired response, the death of the awareness that makes it possible to feel the pain or the glory of other men in oneself."¹⁹ What we need to fear the most is not physical death. We should fear far more that we may die without having known our greatest gift—the power to give our lives for those of others.

We often imagine that the crisis in which the contemporary world finds itself is political. Schweitzer insisted that the political crisis is simply a manifestation of a deeper calamity. Speaking specifically of the colonized world, Schweitzer argued that, "Colonial problems ... cannot be solved by political measures alone. A

new element must be introduced; white and colored must meet in an atmosphere of the ethical spirit. Then only will mutual understanding be possible."²⁰

Every civilization, Schweitzer emphasized, consists of two fundamental realms: the material and the spiritual. Just as we have separated Nature and God, body and soul, practice and theory, we have also disconnected the material and the spiritual aspects of our lives. In the last few centuries, western civilization has radically tipped the scale toward the development of the material aspect and neglected its spiritual counterpart. We have developed the technology which can make human life more convenient, but not morally and spiritually better. We have alienated ourselves from the world and turned our planet into an object we can manipulate any way we want in order to satisfy our ever growing—real and artificial—needs. This *contemptus mundi* is opposite to Schweitzer's reverence for life. To the ever-increasing display of material forces—the force of weapons, the force of money, and the force of deception, Schweitzer opposed what he believed is the best and most potent in us—the power of human spirit. In analogy with the threefold division of the material force (the force of weapons, the force of money, and the force of deception), the power of human spirit can be understood as the threefold force of non-violence, of love, and of truth. One of Schweitzer's letters—a letter to a lieutenant (J.G.) in the US Navy who was on his way to Korea—offers us a better glimpse of what this healer and peacemaker meant by the power of spirit:

Lambaréné, December 27, 1952

Your letter has moved me deeply. You express the hopelessness we all experience in this terrible time.

Forgive me for not having answered you at once. I was traveling. My life is a very difficult one. I cannot master all the things, all the work I should be doing. And I did not want to let someone else write to you. I wanted to write you myself. I believe that there is reason for hope. Hope is there like a small band of light on the sky before the sunrise. There begins to stir in the world a new spirit, a spirit of humanity. The terrible thing was that we fell into inhumanity without knowing it. And because the new spirit begins to stir there is hope, for the spirit is the great transforming power.

This is what the great ones, the prophets, Jesus and Paul have told us. So we will profess that spirit and proclaim it. Revolution is an evil word, for it means that something new is to come through destruction. Good never comes through destruction, that we have seen in all revolutions—they bring good only intermingled with evil. Never talk of revolutions. It is the spirit that works. To create means evolution. All in it is positive. Nothing is negative. The spirit teaches us the great truth that we men must come to love, that is to have reverence for life, to true humanity. So, you and I and so many others, men in whom that spirit is alive and active, will teach, experience, and affirm this with confidence in the power of the spirit.

I would indeed be happy to help you find hope in your despair, for we need hope to live. My thoughts will follow you in Korea. Send me news of you. The simplest way is to address your letters to Dr. Albert Schweitzer, Günsbach, Alsace, France. They will be forwarded from there to me in Africa. God bless you, dear brother. Affectionately,
Albert Schweitzer²¹

III. Reaffirming the Ideal of Perpetual Peace

Schweitzer maintained that the task of every peacemaker is twofold. Most obviously, a peacemaker has to strive toward the elimination of all wars. More importantly, a peacemaker has to develop a positive idea of peace.

This second task is especially difficult in our age because contemporary civilization tends to obliterate the distinction between war and peace. World commerce, which Kant assumed contributes toward world peace, actually stimulates war as a political extension of the economic ambitions. Kant forgot that world commerce does not involve only the necessities of life but weapons of destruction as well. As Schweitzer put it, “If we go down to rock-bottom, it was machinery and world commerce which brought about the world war [WWI].”²²

One of the most powerful branches of modern industry—the war industry—cannot prosper, or even preserve its privileged status, without frequent conflicts and without promoting the atmosphere of fear. Those benefiting from the war industry are so successful in “selling” war:

“We have talked for decades with ever increasing light-mindedness about war and conquest, as if these were merely operations on a chess-board.”²³

We have become so accustomed to war as an “inevitable” aspect of life that the positive conception of peace has become ridiculed as a mere utopia. Schweitzer intended to show that this is not so. In his desire to reaffirm the idea of perpetual peace, Schweitzer returned to Kant, who developed it in his essay “Toward Perpetual Peace.” Despite his admiration for Kant, Schweitzer was highly critical of his treatment of this issue:

[Kant] states his belief that peace will come only with the increasing authority of an international code of law, in accordance with which an international court of arbitration would settle disputes between nations. This authority, he maintains, should be based entirely on the increasing respect which in time, and for purely practical motives, men will hold for the law as such. Kant is unrelenting in his insistence that the idea of a league of nations cannot be hoped for as the outcome of ethical argument, but only as the result of the perfecting of law. He believes that this process of perfecting will come of itself. In his opinion, “nature, that great artist” will lead men, very gradually, it is true, and over a very long period of time, through the march of history and the misery of wars, to agree on an international code of law which will guarantee perpetual peace.²⁴

Schweitzer was critical both of Kant’s idea of “nature, that great artist,” and of his expectations that our increasing perfecting of law will deliver us to the state of perpetual peace. Nature is ethically neutral; it is a force that is both creative and destructive. Schweitzer was equally suspicious of Kant’s proposal with regard to international law. In our western civilization we tend to believe that every problem can be fixed by better organization, by restructuring the existing institutions and rules, and by adding new ones. Yet even when such rules and institutions solve some problems, they inevitably create others. More importantly, peace is not a matter of regulations, of treaties, laws, and rules, but of the proper ethical and spiritual attitude: “Rules for treaties of peace, however well intentioned

and however ably drawn up, can accomplish nothing. Only such thinking as establishes the sway of the mental attitude of reverence for life can bring mankind perpetual peace.”²⁵

Perpetual peace is possible and the ideal of peace in a positive sense is not a utopia, argued Schweitzer. But it has to be implemented from within, not imposed from without. How would Schweitzer bring out such a change?

Since he was not willing to follow Kant, another option would be to pursue the model proposed by René Girard. According to Girard’s view, modern thinkers are deluded in their conviction that we are creative and autonomous beings. Neither do we create ourselves, as Schiller and other Romantics asserted, nor do we prescribe moral and other laws for ourselves, as Kant held. We are, by contrast, the creatures of desires and imitation.²⁶ We desire what we see in others, and we desire to be like others. In order to implement perpetual peace, we have to make this ideal highly desirable and impose it on the younger generations for decades to come. Girard believes that only a continuing and persistent campaign against violence and war would make it possible for us to approach the ideal of perpetual peace.

Schweitzer would be opposed to this approach as well. Peace has to be accepted as a result of our spontaneous spiritual development and insight, not as a result of a controlled mechanical imposition. Girard’s program, Schweitzer would likely assert, may lead us toward the world of Dostoevsky’s *Grand Inquisitor*, or toward Huxley’s *Brave New World*, but not toward genuine and lasting peace.²⁷

The key to the realization of peace is in the strength of the spirit. “If the spirit is strong,” maintained Schweitzer, “it creates world history. If it is weak, it suffers world history.”²⁸ We live in the age of weak spirit; we suffer world history. Perhaps the surest indication of this weakness of spirit is the declining significance of religion in our time. Instead of being the pillar of spirituality and endorsing the highest moral standards and the ideal of peace, the institutionalized religion regularly joined forces with politics and economy during the recent wars; religion put itself in the service of short-sighted goals of the so-called “practical realism.”

Besides religion’s betrayal of its spiritual and ethical calling, Schweitzer argued that the spirit of our age is weak because western civilization has squandered its moral capital. The West has wasted its moral credibility both in its own lands, and in its dealings with the rest of the

world. In addition to the never-ceasing battles for political power and economic gain, the history of the West includes the two most brutal wars the world had ever witnessed. As if the insanity of these wars was not enough, western civilization has involved itself in a maddening – morally unjustified, economically counterproductive, and potentially self-destructive – nuclear arms race. If it cannot establish peace in its own house, what example does western civilization provide for others? On what ground does it pretend to be the moral authority for the rest of the world?

The moral credibility of the West is further ruined by the centuries of attempts to colonize and exploit the rest of the world. The usual ways of colonization do not lead to the development of the natives but to their devastation. The colonizers are oblivious to the tradition, the interests, and the well-being of the natives. Instead of searching for the roots of modern terrorism in Islam and wondering: “Why do they hate us?,” it would be more appropriate to admit our ruthless imperial ambitions and the damage inflicted on the rest of the world.

Schweitzer was convinced that we are morally responsible for the evils of colonization and need to establish a “brotherhood of those who bear the mark of pain.” This brotherhood can be prepared and maintained by what Schweitzer called “constructive colonization,” which would consist in educating the locals in such a way that they develop agriculture and crafts suitable for their natural environment. The cultivation of the natives has to protect their rights, which are common for all humanity. He listed seven of them as the most fundamental: the right to habitation, the right to circulate freely, the right to soil and to its development and use, the right to free work and free exchange, the right to justice, the right to native organization, and the right to education.²⁹

Notice that these rights are not primarily of the political kind. Instead they deal with the creation of conditions which would allow for the maintenance and enhancement of every human life. These are the ideas that Schweitzer did not only propose in theory but tried to promote in the everyday dealings of his hospital. They are also the ideas which must be implemented on a much larger scale. Speaking of the then newly liberated African countries, Schweitzer wondered: “Will they build up a civilization which allows them to develop a way of life most suitable for themselves and their environment; or will they persist in living in non-civilization; or, even worse, in living in an apparent civilization, which will

mean the affirmation of the values of disorder in the world?"³⁰ Schweitzer insisted that the goal of the colonizers must be to help the natives in creating a new civilization on their own soil and then in establishing trade with this new civilization on the basis of justice, reciprocity, and reverence for their natural human dignity.

Confrontations with the injustices done to the natives of Africa led Schweitzer to wonder why the westerners feel entitled to abuse the natives and their natural resources. He thought that we do so because we see ourselves as superior and thus entitled to dominate and exploit others who are not equally developed. Yet what gives us this sense of superiority? Schweitzer's answer was that we develop it because of our advanced knowledge, technology, and organization of life.

Schweitzer came to believe that precisely these elements are mostly irrelevant, sometimes even harmful, for the proper spiritual and ethical orientation in life. However advanced, our knowledge of the world can neither explain the mystery of life nor direct us how to live in the best possible way. By means of our knowledge we cannot discover any purposive evolution in the light of which our lives can acquire their meaning. The ethical elements are not discovered in any form of the world-process: "The last fact which knowledge can discover is that the world is a manifestation, and in every way a puzzling manifestation, of the universal will to live."³¹

Nor did Schweitzer believe that any sense of superiority can be justified by the development of technology and ever-growing organization of life. Quite the contrary, the industrialization of the West has made us less free than we were before. The industrialization has led to overwork, increasing superficiality, ever-narrowing specialization, mechanization of various aspects of life, over-organization, and loss of faith in truth. Schweitzer thus draws the conclusion that:

The essential nature of civilization does not lie in its material achievements, but in the fact that individuals keep in mind the ideals of the perfecting of man, and the improvement of the social and political conditions of peoples, and of mankind as a whole, and that their habit of thought is determined in living and constant fashion by such ideals.... Paradoxical as it may seem, our progress in knowledge and power makes true civilization not easier but more difficult.³²

Schweitzer's program for the restoration of civilization consists of three points: (1) spiritual transformation of the individual; (2) establishing healthy co-operation between the material and spiritual aspects of life; (3) renewing faith in humanity and in the power of truth. These three points suggest that, according to Schweitzer, the difficulty in establishing a positive conception of peace consists not only in the absence of peace among people, but more importantly in an absence of peace within people. These two factors are interrelated, but our duty is primarily to try to develop peace within ourselves. This is the task of spirit, of the spiritual development of every individual. From a spiritual individual, the spirit of peace will spread toward the entire community and toward the world as a whole. This is how Schweitzer believed that, when we make the spirit strong, it creates world history and promotes reverence for every life.³³

By his theory and his life, Schweitzer created a unique example of how we should dedicate our lives to the promotion of peace and the well-being of all living creatures. His life and thought have inspired generations to look for the alternatives to greed, manipulations, and violence. Yet when presented the Nobel Peace Prize for his extraordinary achievements, Schweitzer humbly denied that his approach to peacemaking is either particularly original or outstanding:

I am well aware that what I have had to say on the problem of peace is not essentially new. It is my profound conviction that the solution lies in our rejecting war for an ethical reason; namely, that war makes us guilty of the crime of inhumanity.... The only originality I claim is that for me this truth goes hand in hand with the intellectual certainty that the human spirit is capable of creating in our time a new mentality, an ethical mentality. Inspired by this certainty, I too proclaim this truth in the hope that my testimony may help to prevent its rejection as an admirable sentiment but a practical impossibility. Many a truth has lain unnoticed for a long time, ignored simply because no one perceived its potential for becoming reality.³⁴

Endnotes

1. Schweitzer, *Memoirs of Childhood and Youth*, trans. C. T. Campion (New York: Macmillan, 1949), 74.
2. For Schweitzer's best presentations of the philosophy of reverence for life, see chapter 26, "The Ethics of Reverence for Life," of his book, *The Philosophy of Civilization*, trans. C. T. Campion (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1987), 307-329. See also James Brabazon, *Albert Schweitzer: A Biography*, sec. ed. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 268-287.
3. Schweitzer, "Peace or Atomic War?," in *Albert Schweitzer on Nuclear War and Peace*, ed. and intro. Homer A. Jack (Elgin, Ill.: Brethren Press, 1988), 89-90. Also reprinted in Norman Cousins, *Dr. Schweitzer of Lambaréné* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), 227-254.
4. Schweitzer, "Peace or Atomic War?," 75.
5. Letter to Pablo Casals, November 22, 1958. Schweitzer's correspondence regarding nuclear arms race is reprinted in Homer A. Jack, *op. cit.*, 95-165.
6. Schweitzer, "Peace or Atomic War?," 74.
7. *Ibid.*
8. For the exact current numbers, see the web page of the Natural Resources Defense Council: www.nrdc.org/nuclear/nudb/datab19.asp.
9. For further discussion of this issue, see Graham Allison, *Nuclear Terrorism* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004), 217 ff.
10. This quote is from Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2003), 227. See also pages 225-232 of Chomsky's book for further discussion.
11. Quoted from Erica Anderson, *The Schweitzer Album: A Portrait in Words and Pictures* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1965), 38.
12. This quote is from Keith Schneider's Forward for Carole Gallagher's book, *American Ground Zero: The Secret Nuclear War* (New York: Random House, 1993). The most important study of the health effects of testing is *National Cancer Institute Study Estimating Thyroid Doses of I-131 Received by Americans from Nevada Atmospheric Nuclear Bomb Tests* (published in 1997). For the human aspect of the Chernobyl tragedy, see Svetlana Alexievich, *Voices from Chernobyl*, trans. Keith Gessen (London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2005).
13. Norman Cousins, *op. cit.*, 179. See also his book *Albert Schweitzer's Mission: Healing and Peace* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985), 5-141.
14. Quoted from George Marshall and David Poling, *Schweitzer: A Biography* (New York: Albert Schweitzer Fellowship and Pillar Books, 1975), 292.
15. The process of making this decision and the complexities involved in the realization to go to Africa are described by Schweitzer in his numerous writings. See, for example, *Out of My Life and Thought: An Autobiography*, trans. Antje Bultmann Lemke (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 81-161; and *On the Edge of the Primeval Forest* (London: Collins, 1956), 9-33. See also James Brabazon, *op. cit.*, 186-230.
16. Schweitzer used and explained this expression in his books *Out of My Life and Thought: An Autobiography*, 190-196, and *On the Edge of the Primeval Forest*, 125-127.
17. Cousins, *Dr. Schweitzer of Lambaréné*, 209.
18. Cousins, *op. cit.*, 220.
19. Schweitzer, "Civilization and Colonization," reprinted as Appendix I to George Seaver's book, *Albert Schweitzer: The Man and His Mind* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1947), 327. For further discussion, see Schweitzer's *On the Edge of the Primeval Forest*, 86-127.
20. Quoted from Erica Anderson, *op. cit.*, 68.
21. Schweitzer, *The Philosophy of Civilization*, 88.

22. *Ibid.*, 15. Derek Leebaert points out who may prosper from the current “war on terror”: “Well-connected interests such as insurance companies might prosper in the long term; the government and military would be free to expand; senior officials could grow more powerful and for a while more eminent; university centers and foundations would flourish amid the new discipline of ‘terrorism studies’; and exciting technologies would be incubated as Americans went about their business”; *The Fifty-Year Wound: The True Price of America’s Cold War Victory*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2002), 628-629.

23. Quoted from Schweitzer’s Nobel Peace Prize address; reprinted in Homer A. Jack, *op. cit.*, 43-56.

24. Schweitzer, *The Philosophy of Civilization*, 344.

25. The best presentation of Girard’s “mimetic desire” is given in his book *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).

26. If there is any contemporary thinker with whom Schweitzer would agree with regard to the ideal of perpetual peace, it would be Gandhi. I explore their relationship in a not yet published paper, “Building a Peaceful World: Mahatma Gandhi and Albert Schweitzer.”

27. Schweitzer, “Religion in Modern Civilization,” originally published in *The Christian Century*, November 21-28, 1934; reprinted as Appendix III in G. Seaver, *op. cit.*, 335-342.

28. Schweitzer, “The Relations of the White and Colored Races,” in *The Contemporary Review*, vol. 133, No. 745 (January 1928), 65-70.

29. Schweitzer, “Humanity and Peace,” reprinted in Homer A. Jack, *op. cit.*, 39.

31. Schweitzer, *The Philosophy of Civilization*, 76.

32. *Ibid.*, 86-87.

33. For further discussion, see Schweitzer, “Humanity and Peace,” 41.

34. Quoted from Schweitzer’s Nobel Peace Prize address.