



Next Evolutionary Step: (NESt)

A work in progress

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Presentation August 2013

what
ON EARTH
should we
do...

*Reverence for Life U.K.
together with*

Association Internationale pour l'oeuvre du Dr. Albert Schweitzer de Lambarene



NESt

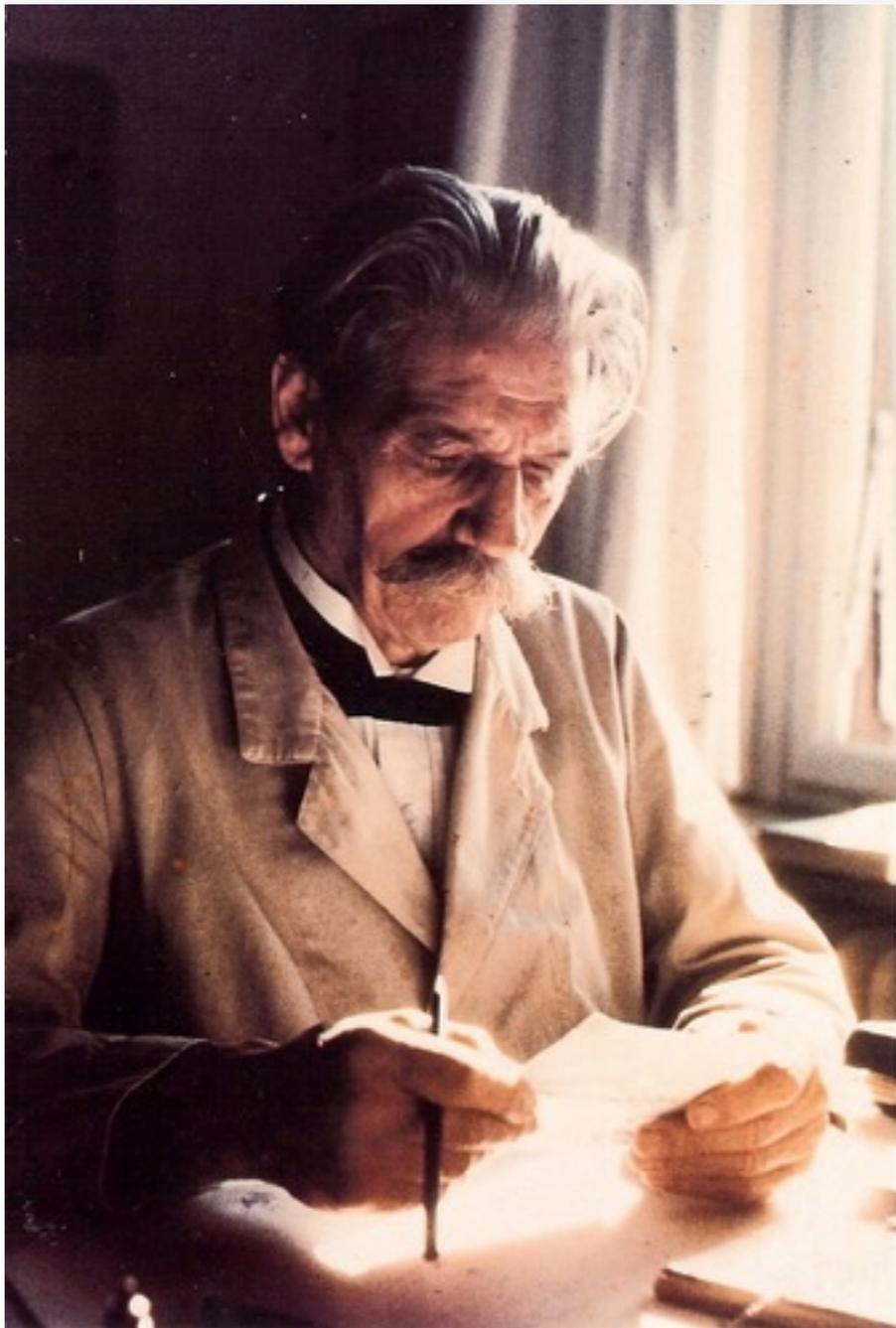
The Next Evolutionary Step



Photo Erica Anderson

A way of thinking about the world
and our place in it;
inspired by
Dr. Albert Schweitzer

Albert Schweitzer: the ethical Philosopher



The value of his message to us today.

This exceptional personality built his world-view on the ethic of

Reverence for Life.

This is how he expressed its central thought:

“Every thoughtful human being experiences the compulsion, to accord every will to live the same reverence and honour as his own.”

But who was this man and why should his thought become a reality in our own daily lives?



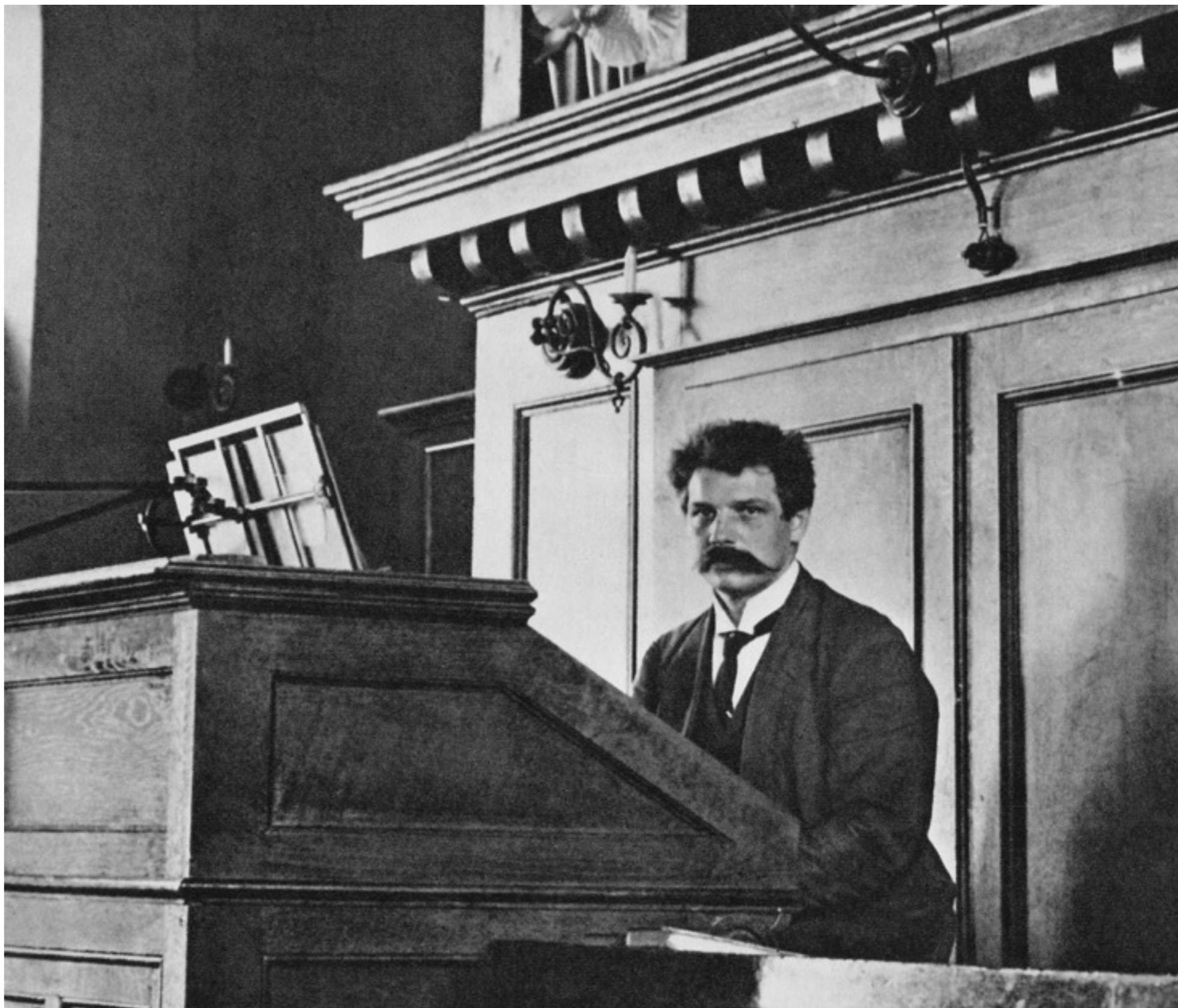
Born in 1875 in the Alsace, here he is at the age of 15 or so, with his family.



When
he was 21,
having got up one
fine Spring morning,
he looked out across
the beautiful green
valley and thought
that he was a very
lucky man.

There and then
he made a promise to
himself:

He would continue
his academic career
until he was 30
and would then find
some way of serving
humanity without
having to use
words.



As his 30th birthday approached he decided to go to Africa as a Doctor.
To earn money to build a hospital there he gave organ concerts.



The University of Strasbourg had to make a special exception to allow their professor of philosophy and theology to start studying medicine as well.



Eight years later he qualified as a medical doctor, married his friend and confidant Helene Breslau and together they sailed out of Bordeaux harbour 100 years ago.



Leaving the green valley and the village of Günsbach in the Alsace behind.



LAMBARÉNÉ
IN THE GABONESE REPUBLIC



A 1980s aerial photograph of the tropical jungle near the equator, in the Gabon, which was called French Equatorial Africa when the Schweitzers arrived there in 1913.



They started treating their first patients in a chicken coup.



Within months, hospital buildings at the river's edge started to take shape. There patients and their families had good access from the river by canoe. Up on the hill were the buildings of the Paris Mission Station.

Already
at the age of 25
Schweitzer saw dark clouds
rise up over European culture
and embarked on a plan
to write a Philosophy of
Civilisation.

“.....Slowly
we crept upstream.
Lost in thought I sat...,
struggling to find the elemental
and universal concept of the
ethical I had not discovered
in any philosophy.
....Late on the third day
....there flashed upon my mind,
....the phrase
‘reverence for life’.
The iron door had yielded.
The path through the thicket
had become visible....
I was at the root of
the problem. ”

Albert Schweitzer:
Out of My Life and Thought





From then on, amongst all the other things he did, he worked - on and off - until 1944 on the 'Philosophy of Civilisation', which was now to appear in four volumes.



From
his early youth
he saw himself as a
citizen of the world,
a member of the whole
human
family.

And now,
for the rest of his life,
looking back at Europe
from the depth of
the African jungle,
he recognised the
deep-seated causes of
the problems faced by
humankind
and showed us a
way forward,
a possible
path.

The path of
Reverence for Life,
All life!

To recap: Not only a philosopher - also a man of action!

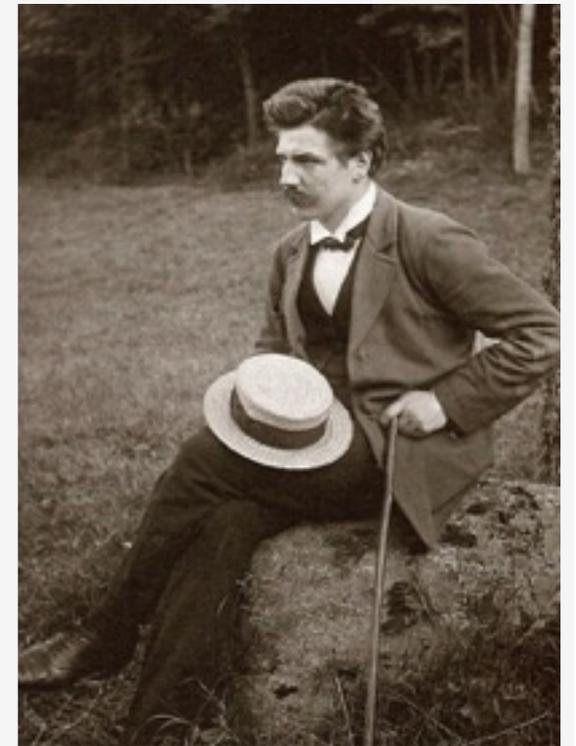


Schweitzer builds his hospitals with his own hands. and is not embarrassed by dirty hands and aprons.

Aged 21, he sets himself the challenge that when he is 30 he will look for a way of life which will allow him to serve through action,

“without the use of words”.

Thus, aged 30, the pastor/organist/theologian/philosopher, studies medicine and prepares for Africa.



Soon after his arrival in Africa however, he is given the opportunity to return to his writings, and he discovers the ethical principle which will guide his thoughts and human evolution from then on.

What then has he to say that is so important for us today?

We are now a global civil society.



The systems of our affluent society are beginning to falter. Relentlessly they seem to steer us towards global disaster.

From deep in the tropical rainforest far away from this 'affluent society,' Schweitzer saw Western civilisation getting into deep trouble.

He saw that the sacrifice of conscience on the alter of material progress, fuelled by the energy of greed and competition, would inevitably have dire consequences for society as a whole.

With his ethic of Reverence for Life he offered a guiding principle for a change in direction and for the next bit of the journey of human evolution.



The 4th volume of his Philosophy of Civilisation was to appear under the title "Kulturstaat" (The Civilised State).

What can we do to prevent civilisation from collapsing over the heads of our grandchildren ?

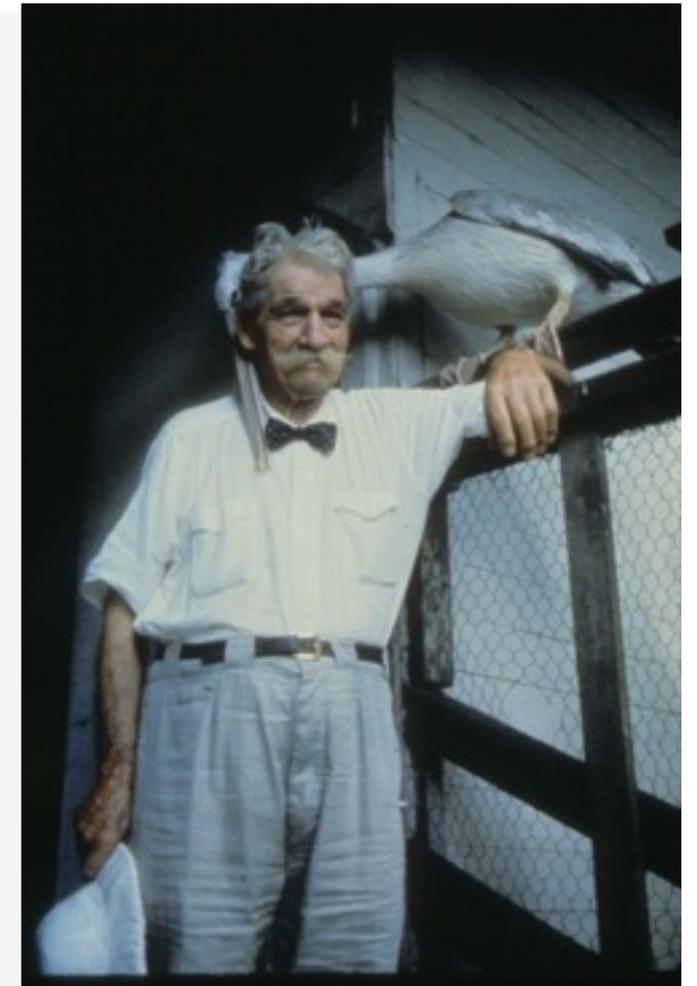
The next stage in human evolution.



Evolution is successful adaptation by living organisms to altered living conditions.

(Revolutions run in circles and end up where they started)

For a creature like homo sapiens, which has begun to develop self-consciousness, this involves the conscious recognition of the consequences of its actions on its living conditions, and an adaptation in such a way, that its own existence and that of its environment are not destroyed but enhanced.



Schweitzer's Reverence for Life provides a guiding principle for the necessary adaptation.

There have been many creatures who have not managed it, and our irresponsible behaviour in this epoch endangers not only the survival of our species but that of countless other creatures.

Can we imagine in our heart of hearts that humankind is capable of such an evolution?

How far have we already come?

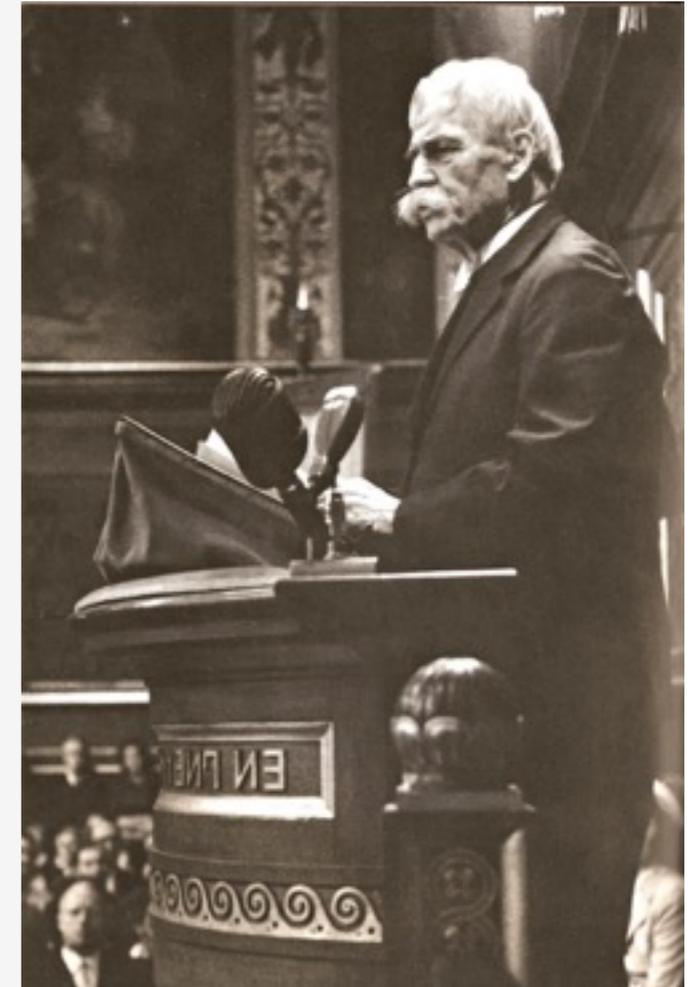


Significant evolutionary steps which humankind has already taken:

- From hunter-gatherer to farmer;
- to scribe and mathematician;
- to industrialist and global corporate commercialist.

And in the last 500 years:

- From the horse-drawn carriage to supersonic flight;
- from quill and parchment to the digital computer;
- from earth as the centre of the world to space exploration;
- from bows and arrows to the hydrogen bomb;
- from the kings schilling to digital trillions on the ether.



1953 Schweitzer received the Nobel Peace Prize - an epoch-changing turning point.

But how can we harness the powers of these technical advances?

For this we need a

different kind of evolution!

This different kind of evolution has also started long ago.

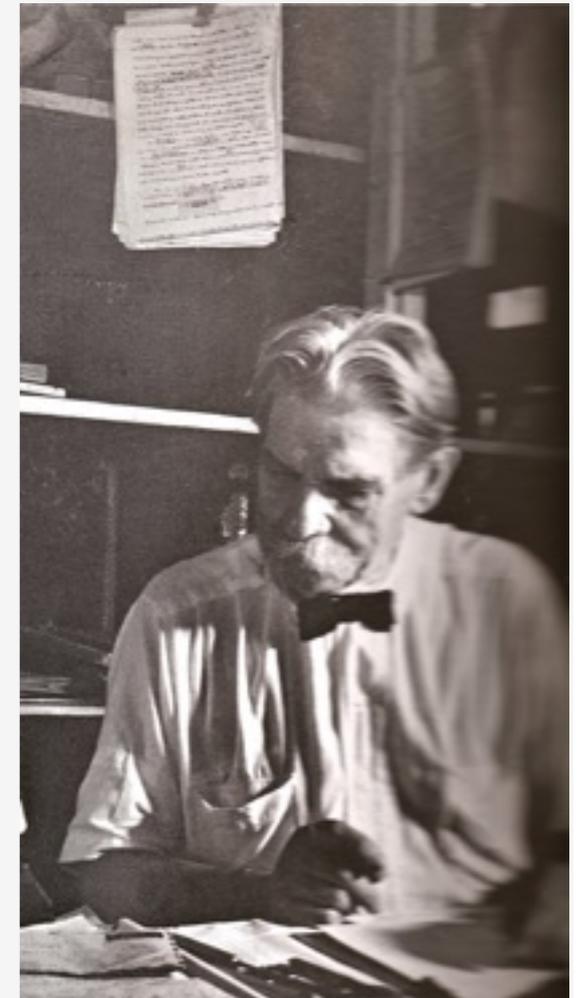


It also advances in big steps:

Between 1000 - 800 BC. - Bramanism, Hinduism,
- Zarathustra, Elia & Elisa

Between 600 - 300 BC. - Lao-tse, Kung-tse, Meng-tse,
- Buddha, Pythagoras, Heraklit;
- Sokrates, Plato, Aristotle, Epikur;

“What mystery lies behind these names and dates”, writes Schweitzer,
“it will always remain unfathomable, that such great thinkers should
appear at the same time and amongst peoples living at such great
distances from each other.....The mystery of this springtime of human
thought is greater still than the simultaneous presence of so much
diversity of creative genius during the European Renaissance .”



There was also a time when virtue was seen as heroic and the hero rode out in the
cause of justice, in the defence of the weak and the protection of the vulnerable.

Many believe that we are once more living on the threshold
of such a time?

New developments are already in full swing!



An estimated 2 million NGOs worldwide, stood in 2007 for social justice and the protection of the environment.

On all continents and in nearly all countries this growing 'movement without a name' is unstoppably making its way.

Some call this movement the 'great new wave' and occupy themselves with questions of transition.

Leaderless, this movement belongs to a wide public who are concerned for all life on this planet. (Not to be confused with those who rebel out of boredom and general frustration.)

The time will come when a critical mass of those who can see that fundamental change must come will force politicians and leaders of commerce and industry to listen and take note.

Schweitzer said that in Spring a fresh green dresses the meadows, because each blade of grass turns green from inside out. Thus it will also be when environmental concerns are infused by the conviction of reverence for all life.



EARTH CHARTER
VISION + ACTION + ETHIC

But what is the central problem of our time?

It is the economy causing mischief with borrowed money.



We know that unlimited growth is an impossibility on our finite planet.

Yet our current monetary system cannot function without growth!!!

We have hitched our faith onto this “market economy” !

The all powerful, all knowing, infinitely wise, all pervading, all supporting

“MARKET”

Who dares question it? Who can imagine an alternative?

This lack of imagination demonstrates that we do not trust ourselves to organise, think, manage, and plan for the common good. How sensible can it be to offload this responsibility onto a mechanism like “the market”?

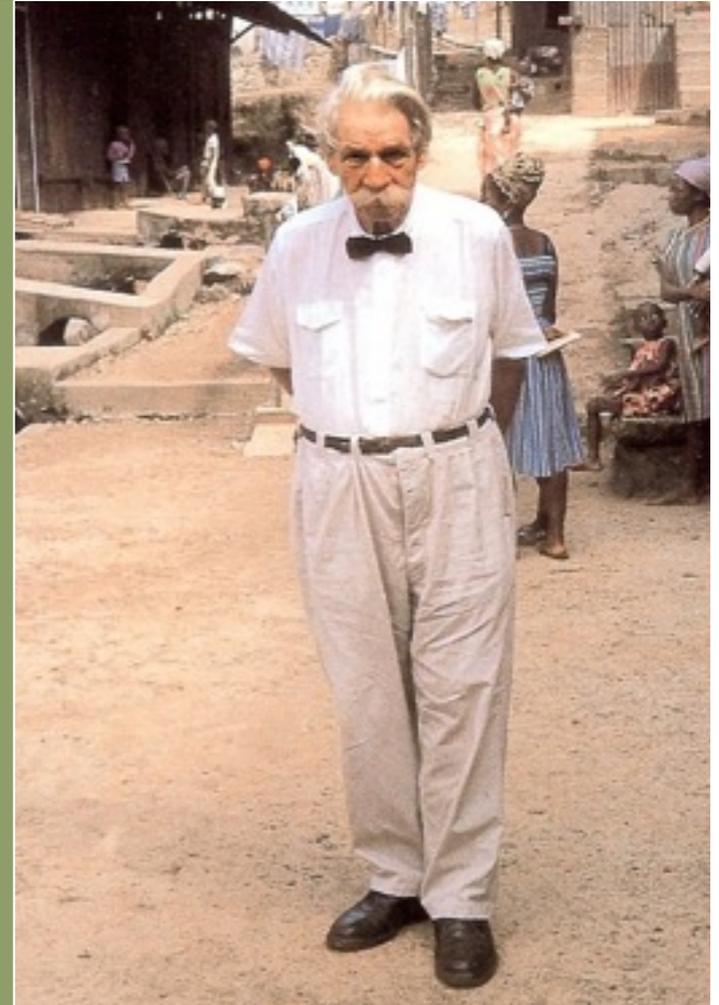
What has Albert Schweitzer got to say to all this?

The spiritual and material conditions of the time. Albert Schweitzer



Philosophy of Civilisation III, Part Four, Chapter One - I quote:

- 1)“The collapse of our civilisation is only partly due to the enormous strain exerted by the political.....”
- 2)“How to extricate ourselves from this chaos?.....”
- 3)“Only **a new spirit** is capable of leading us out of the chaos”
- 4)“Only **an ethical spirit**, not any considerations of expediency, can bring us poor supermen.....”
- 5)“**The new spirit** can not arise in response to ideas, which are constructed.....”
- 6)“We are too much inclined to overlook the fact,.....”
- 7)“Not until we again begin to think for ourselves,

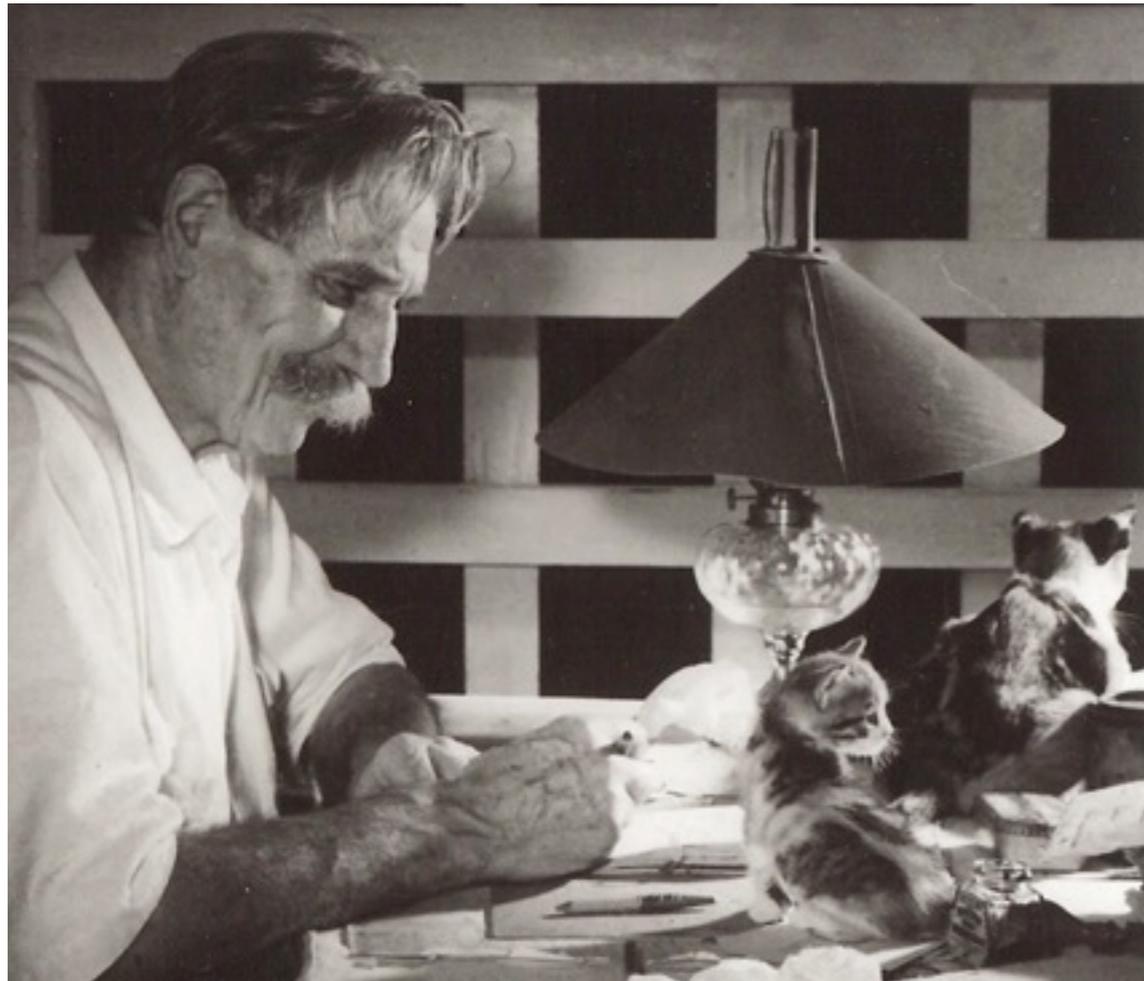


“They had lost the insight, the ability and the will to master the situation”

What does Schweitzer mean with the words: “a new spirit”?

(He himself says in a footnote - “ We speak of ‘spirit’ but do not earnestly consider what it is”)

A few of Schweitzer's hints about the question of 'spirit'.



“Only a time which can muster the courage for honesty and sincerity, can be possessed of that truth which can infuse it with spiritual power.”

“Sincerity and honesty are the foundation for a spiritual life.”

“I remain nevertheless convinced that truth, love, peaceableness, gentleness and goodness are the powers which have dominion over all power.”

“It is our foolish neglect, that we dare not be serious about kindness.”

“The great working capital for all undertakings is trust, without which no useful work can be done. On all levels it creates the conditions for positive outcomes.”

**Sincerity, honesty, kindness and trust:
How can these become the norm in public life?**



The NESt-Initiative aims to encourage all of us, but especially young people, to build on the foundations which Schweitzer has laid for the creation of a truly civil society.

**The starting-point:
The conviction that we can take this next evolutionary step!**

In essence the NESt Initiative grew out of the realisation that:

- a) humankind stands at the threshold of its **next evolutionary challenge**;
- b) humankind's inventive creativity can only lead to a civilised and wholesome global society if we learn to reintegrate ourselves as an integral part of nature and to **treat all life with the reverence and respect it deserves**;
- c) this reverence finds expression in a way of life, in which all action is motivated by sincerity, honesty and kindness, in other words - **it is ethical**.

We have but to find the courage to stand by these convictions!

What then are the challenges of our time?



Let us imagine a global society:

- 1) with an economy which cares for earth's longterm well-being
- 2) with a money system that serves rather than dictates our activities
- 3) with equity between rich and poor societies
- 4) with equitable healthcare and social service systems
- 5) with healthy food policies, eating habits & work environments
- 6) with peaceful conflict resolution upholding international law
- 7) with adequate measures to prevent run-away climate change
- 8) with proper values & husbandry applied to earth's resources**
- 9) with greed replaced by honesty, kindness and generosity in commerce
- 10) with ethical behaviour as the norm in public life
- 11) with time and inclination to contemplate the meaning of life
- 12) with public awareness of our true place in nature and on this our planet.

Let's take No.8 to demonstrate how NEST envisages working with these

Proper husbandry of the earth's resources?



1. How do we achieve a responsible management of and respect for the earth's resources, when:

- the oil-corporations determine our transport and energy policies?
- the fashion industry is geared to rapid and constant redundancy?
- the only answer politicians have to the 2008/9 financial crisis is - 'more growth'?
- the food industry discards or loses 1/3 of the global food production ?

How can the ethos of reverence for life engage with this state of affairs?

Let us take a critical look at a currently topical situation concerning the oil industry:

The problem of the Arctic

The ice is melting. The oil companies are making a dash for what might be found there.

The lure of potential profit is irresistible.

Are we going to stand by and allow this to happen?

Shall we briefly take a closer look at this?

Some of the facts about the situation in the Arctic today?



The ice is melting: 75% (Volume) in 30 years, and accelerating;

The extraction and exploitation race for oil and minerals has already begun;

No more than 3 years of global oil demand are expected to be found;

No oil spill response techniques exist which could operate effectively in the Arctic;

Countless animals, plants and people are endangered;

Not only by climate-change but also by oil catastrophes;

A new “cold war” is in the making.



Some of the questions which arise:



Do we think this problem is too big, too difficult for us to tackle?

Will science, technology and the market adequately solve this problem as well.....?

**Are there situations in which we must begin to learn to
think beyond the national interest?**

What are the issues in the Arctic in the light of Reverence for Life?



Schweitzer drew a distinction between the farmer, who cut the grass of his meadow for his cows, and the one who thoughtlessly decapitated the stems growing at the edge of his path on his way home.

Key here is the interpretation of the word “necessity”!



In the light of Reverence for Life and **the service of Earth as a whole**, what is “necessity” for us in the Arctic?

Future outcomes for the Arctic?

Two possible solutions



A UN protected global commons for earth's future generations.



Decades of industrialisation and exploitation, battled through in a cold war atmosphere, with the most dire consequences for local landscape, animals, plants and human habitation!



Thus
Schweitzer
looked out into the
world 50 years ago
when we knew him
and worked
with him.

He died
two years later
at the age of 90
in 1965

What
kind of a
world will you
be looking out into
in 50 years time?
And what will you
be telling your
grandchildren
then
?