William Gayley Simpson on Christianity and the West

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The following is adapted from a book I wrote based on interviews with the late white activist William Pierce, *The Fame of a Dead Man's Deeds*.

"Someone else you might want to include in this [book] project," Pierce called out to me as I was leaving his office at the end of one of our evening talks, "is William Gayley Simpson. Do you know about him?"

Very little. All I knew about Simpson was that he had written a book called *Which Way Western Man?* and that Pierce had published it under his own imprint, National Vanguard Books. I hadn't read the book.

"Simpson was born in 1892, the same year as my father," Pierce continued, "so he was a generation ahead of me. In the '30s he was interacting with the public in a big way, speaking at a lot of universities, mostly about peace issues, how we must never get into another world war and that sort of thing, and at one time he taught Latin, mathematics, and history at a boarding school around where he lived in New York state. Somehow, he had gotten hold of something I had written—this must have been around 1975—and he wrote me about it. At that time, he was over 80-years-old [he died in 1991 at 99].

"We started corresponding. I found Simpson to be a deep, sensitive, and serious man. He invited me to visit him up at his farm. He had built a farmhouse with his own hands, a really nice house, and he had a shop and outbuildings. He did some planting, but mostly he just lived there and thought and wrote and maintained contact [letters in those days] with people from all over the world. I stayed with him a few days and visited him a couple more times after that.

"Simpson told me about a book he was finishing up, which

turned out to be *Which Way Western Man?* I read it and was very impressed and published it. We sold that printing, and then we did two more printings, about seven thousand copies, and sold out on those. Let me get you a copy of *Which Way Western Man?*"

Pierce stood up from his desk, turned to his left, took a couple of steps, and turned left again through an open door into his library. I followed. It was dark in there—I could barely make out the titles of the books. It was a good-sized room, about fifteen-by-twenty feet. It reminded me of the stacks in a university library, the same kind of metal shelving. Rows of shelves tightly packed from floor to ceiling with books spanned the room's interior. Pierce had labels taped onto the shelves categorizing his collection, so he knew right where to find the Simpson book. I stood behind him and took in this tall grey-haired man standing in this gloomy library as he turned a few pages of the Simpson book, his eyes just a few inches from the print as he had very poor sight.

Pierce handed me the bulky, dark blue paperback. My hand gave way a bit from the weight of what I later learned was a 758-page volume.

I thanked Pierce for the book and told him I would spend the rest of that evening and the next day looking it over, and that if I could get my thoughts organized I'd talk to him the next evening about what Simpson had written.

I spent the rest of the night paging through *Which Way Western Man?* stopping here and there to read a few pages. It quickly became clear that this tome covered far more than I had the time to explore at that point, so I looked for a theme or emphasis in the book that I could sound out Pierce about when we spoke again the next evening.

Within an hour, I found one that intrigued me. A central strand in Simpson's book is his perspective on Christianity. He had studied for the ministry at the renowned Union Theological Seminary. Christian teachings guided his thoughts and actions until his mid- to late-thirties, and the church's place in Western culture provided a context for his reflections throughout his life. I

had the angle I would bring to my engagement with the Simpson reading, which took up my time until well past midnight that night and all of the next day until my 7:00 p.m. meeting with Pierce.

In *Which Way Western Man?* Simpson informs the reader that in his twenties he had read about the life of Francis of Assisi and found it an inspiration and personal challenge. In Simpson's eyes, St. Francis exemplified what Jesus meant for his most dedicated followers to do in the world. At 28 years of age, during a month alone on an island in the St. Lawrence River, Simpson made the decision to incorporate this ideal into his own life:

> In 1920, after five years of relentless questing for the place in our world where I might make my life count for the most, I committed myself without any reserve and without compromise to a course of action dictated to me by the farthest reaches of my religious insight and devotion, my highest idealism, and my most thoroughly thought-out convictions. With whole-souled abandon, I gave myself over to an effort to put the teaching of Jesus into practice. I took him at his word—with absolute literalness—in the same sense that Francis of Assisi did.

Simpson lived a Franciscan life for nine years. Centering his efforts in large cities, he made his way across the American continent trying to better the circumstance of people who were having a tough go of it in life. He toiled as a common laborer, giving his work as a gift and living on whatever others chose to give him in return. It proved to be an experience that was not only a test of what Simpson was made of as a person but also a test of the very foundations that had heretofore directed his life: liberalism, idealism, and Christianity.

Simpson ended this phase of his life when he reached the conclusion that the way he had been conducting himself for nearly a decade was neither the best way for him to serve others nor consistent with his own personal make-up. As laudable as it seemed on the face of it, he decided, what he had been doing hadn't

gotten at the heart of what was wrong with mankind, because it isn't so much the *conditions* of human beings that need improvement but rather their *caliber*, and the way he had gone about things hadn't gotten at that.

Simpson had tried to become equal to the lowest and the least of individuals, and that just wasn't him, that wasn't his path in life, it wasn't his way forward. It became clear to him that he wanted to affirm the life of the mind and connect with the aristocratic instinct and taste that he felt strongly was natural to him. Plus, he was simply tired of the urban life he had been living:

> I came to be filled with a growing sense of the madness of cities, and indeed our whole civilization, and had a deepening hunger for mountains and the sea, and a desire to live close to the earth and to grow my own food.

In 1932, Simpson left his wife and child, who had accompanied him on his Franciscan venture. A friend helped him make a down payment on a farm in the Catskill Mountains of New York state, where he spent the rest of his long life. His primary vocation from that point forward would be to study mankind—its nature, its limitations, its possibilities. Instead of being occupied with here-and-now destitution and despair as he had been, he would be guided by a positive vision of the future that he would help create:

> It was to the future I wished to address myself [in order to] prepare for the new dawn which I believed must at last succeed the storm of the night.

Simpson gave over the rest of his life to pointing the way to a finer human existence with particular reference to those he increasingly came to see as his people, whites of northern European background. For them especially, he described a life of health, robustness, beauty, nobility, and meaning far beyond what

they were currently seeking and achieving and far more in keeping with what he considered their true nature and possibilities. Simpson wrote a series of papers that spelled out his thoughts and sent them to friends. These papers became the basis for *Which Way Western Man?*

I'll focus here on his thoughts on Christianity. I refer you to the book for his other ideas.

Simpson points out that "would you be a good Christian, then do good for others"—with special emphasis on caring for and giving to the underprivileged, the oppressed, the unfortunate, the sick, the sorrowful, the suffering--has always been a central message in Christianity. This Christian ideal of service to others in need originally grew out of the conception of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. In more recent times, this ideal has carried a social gospel connotation; reform the world has been the call, the charge, to the faithful. It was this service/reform message of Christianity that came through powerfully to Simpson during his younger years. It gave his life meaning and direction and enabled him to feel righteous and in the light, a member of the spiritual vanguard.

The commitment and diligence he demonstrated in his Franciscan period was indeed praiseworthy, Simpson believes now, and as he thinks back on it, he did ease the pain of many people. Nevertheless, Simpson is convinced that he was misguided during this phase of his life, because his Christian orientation focused him on issues of human equality and distracted him from what his experience over those nine years had taught him was the most fundamental issue confronting mankind: human *quality*. His Franciscan perspective had worked against the only kind of life he ultimately considered worth seeking for himself and for others—a life of quality.

Human beings, Simpson concluded, are in fact *not* equal. Moreover, qualitatively they are not as good as they once were, and the prime reason for that is the better elements of mankind are being outbred by the worst. We need to attend to that problem and

do something about it, asserts Simpson. *Which Way Western Man?* is grounded in this concern for the quality of human beings and individual and collective life and the related issue of human breeding patterns.

Simpson defines an approach to life that he believes to be is better than the ideal of Christian service he formerly used a a guiding principle. Instead of attempting to save someone or ameliorate some social condition, Simpson stresses letting one's own light shine; that is to say, living honestly in accordance with one's own highest vision of oneself. Conducting one's life on this basis, contends Simpson, aligns with basic human nature. “No unspoiled and untamed life wants to 'be good.’ It wants to be itself.”

The great drive in all unbroken life, writes Simpson, is to determine to live as who you really are. Make your outside match your inside. Obey your deepest impulses. Satisfy your most inalienable and unappeasable desires. Rather than follow Jesus, suggests Simpson, follow the god within you.

Christianity's stress on spiritual commonality and unity among its adherents obscures a much-needed sense of biological and cultural connectedness and identification. While Christianity calls for deference to the idea of the brotherhood of all mankind, Simpson calls for a heightened awareness of what differentiates us, those of northern European heritage, from other peoples and the preservation of an "indissoluble bond" among us. This bond is crucially important because it encourages feelings of indebtedness and obligation to our ancestors and a commitment to serve the future well-being of our culture and our race.

Those who attend to the well-being of the white race will be drawn, Simpson believes, to see what he sees: that a people will not maintain or go beyond themselves if they don't give serious attention to replenishing themselves with, as he puts it, "a steady stream of vigorous and gifted new life." To be sure, the church is interested in new life, since it wants as many in its flock as possible, but its basic concern is with the quantity and not the

quality of that new life. Simpson affirms service to the survival and qualitative advancement of one's people, which is different from seeking to heal the sick or serve the poor.

Simpson argues that Christianity's preoccupation with devotional practices and inner states of being separates us from the physical side of existence, and that that alienation contributes to our stagnation and deterioration both as individuals and as a people. Simpson warns against looking away from

> man's relationship to the earth from which he has been formed; the state of the soil that supports the plant and animal life which supplies his food; and man's physical health and bodily beauty, and the vigorous will to beget children as indications of it.

We are a physical organism, a part of nature, at a particular point in the evolutionary process, argues Simpson. Church dogma and practice obscure those realities, and that does us a disservice. Christianity does not concern itself enough with strength, vitality, distinctions based on blood and breeding, and aristocratic excellence, which support the qualitative advancement of the race.

Claims Simpson, Christianity has had a weakening, emasculating effect on Western civilization, as it has enslaved us to ideals and ways that vitiate our vigor as a people. Christianity is characterized by "soft" values: unselfishness, charitableness, forgiveness, patience, humility, and pity. The church has focused too much, Simpson holds, on "the poor, the sick, the defeated, the lowly, and sinners and outcasts" and not enough on "the well-constituted, and healthy, and beautiful, and capable, and strong, and proud."

Simpson believes that people will become what they most value and what they most attend to, and Christianity points us in precisely the wrong direction. Christianity places too great an emphasis on one's subordination to an external deity and the transference of responsibility and power to this higher authority. Simpson points out that prior to the dominance of Christianity,

Europeans stretching back for three thousand years of their history believed most in the individuals who were noble and excellent. They expected people to stand on their own two feet and make something of themselves and looked to leadership from those who proved themselves to be truly superior.

Christianity's sentimentality and otherworldliness has undercut man's belief in his innermost self. It has taken away his struggle, without which there is no growth, no fulfillment. It has not encouraged man to get his roots deep down in the soil, to food and drink, and to force his tender shoots up to the sky, to sun and air. To the contrary, it has told man that all this costly and painful labor has been done for him by another, and to accept this fact and rest in it, and eventually he will be transplanted to another garden (heaven) and be miraculously transformed into a full-grown and perfect flower. There simply isn't any other garden, says Simpson, and to live as if there is will result in this garden on earth, our garden, the only one there is, remaining—or becoming—barren.

Simpson looks upon Christianity as a Semitic religion and foreign to the European spirit. Christ was a Jew. His teachings were filtered through Saul of Tarsus—known as the Apostle Paul—to the extent that that Christianity is arguably Paul's religion more than Jesus', and Paul was a Jew. In the long run, contends Simpson, no people can flourish, or even maintain themselves, unless they live by a religion that accords with their own nature and ways:

> A people's religion should come out of their own blood. It should be their own innermost soul made manifest, the elevation before their eyes of their own hopes and dreams, and of the lessons they have learned through their own immemorial experience.

Those of European heritage need a religion of their own, Simpson argues, one that is consonant with what is best in their past and the exigencies of their present. He calls for a religion

> really our own, one that will burst forth a new comprehension of life, a new vision, a new faith, a new discipline for every side of our life, personal and social, for man and woman and child, from top to bottom, for the lowest to the highest.

Simpson envisions a bible that holds up our own ideals and traditions, that is the record of our supreme achievements and triumphs, that tells the story of our saints and heroes, and that contains the admonitions of our great wise men and guides and the vision of our own hopes and dreams and purposes pushed deep into a distant future.

> It will be the Book of Life not of the poor and the weak or the meek, a book of the strong and the masterful, who by their mastery *over themselves* will shape their life into something more beautiful in soul and in body. It will be their book of gratitude to Life, their book of rejoicing, their cradle-song and their battle song, the mirror of their soul soaring over vast abysses and the eagle eye studying far horizons. It will be the supremely yea-saying book of a people resolved at all costs to live on the heights, to be itself; and that will rather perish than give way to any other, to serve his will.

Why, Simpson asks, cannot Aristotle be our Moses, Homer or some of the Icelandic sagas our Exodus and Judges? Why cannot Dante or Goethe take the place of Job? Why cannot Blake supplant the Revelation of St. John and Shakespeare replace Ecclesiastes? Why cannot the Psalms be superseded by the record of some ones of us, in the past or now or yet to come, whose lives and teachings are most inspiring to our collective soul?