

IN LOVE WITH LIFE

Edmond Israel
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**AN AMERICAN DREAM
OF A LUXEMBOURGER**

Interviewed by Raymond Flammant

Pampered child
Refugee
Factory worker
International banker

New Thinking

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An American Dream of a Luxembourger
by Edmond Israel

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Entretiens avec Raymond Flammant
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*I dedicate these pages to all those
who brought light and warmth to my life.*

I thank my dear wife Renée for her counsel and advice.

*I express my particular appreciation to Raymond Flammant,
who asked me the right questions.*

*Thanks also to my assistant, Suzanne Cholewka Pinai,
for her efficient help.*

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Foreword

The first time I met Edmond Israel was in June 1996, two days before he was to receive the degree, Doctor of Law, *honoris causa*, from Sacred Heart University at our campus in Luxembourg. He had been highly recommended for the degree by members of the Board of Regents, especially Henri Alhborn, a leading representative of the Luxembourg business and political community.

The purpose of our meeting was to be introduced to each other and to spend a few minutes chatting informally. It turned out to be so much more than that. More than two hours later we had engaged in an extraordinary discussion about the dialogue between science and religion, the implications of chaos theory for modern philosophy, the relationship between ethics and the global challenges of our times, as well as the current state of inter-religious dialogue between Christians and Jews. We both knew that we had just scratched the surface of our mutual intellectual interests and concerns. More important, we initiated a rich friendship that has grown ever-deeper over the ensuing years, to the point where we are now the best of friends. Our Friday afternoon exchange is now a tradition: I say to him, “Shalom

Shabbat,” and he responds, “Shalom Sunday.” We cherish our differences that make us stronger together.

Edmond Israel embraces the world as it is, while at the same time he delights in working for what the world can become. The unprecedented problems that challenge most of our major institutions and our traditional ways of doing things are so new that few of us have the courage or even the capacity to consider them. Yet Edmond Israel enthusiastically relishes the opportunity to think differently and boldly about how to hold our problems together in creative tension and wrestle with them until moral and efficient solutions can be found. For him, thinking in new ways is necessary for humanity to reach its highest potential and this requires a constant reappraisal and revision of the conventional ways we live and work in the world.

Edmond Israel’s life represents an extraordinary example of the best of Western humanism. He is an outstanding business leader, but even more important, he is a remarkable human being whose heart is compassionate and full of joy. Edmond knows the depth of the journey into self-discovery and how those who walk that road are tested by the fire of adversity. He has seen the worst and best of times and chooses to believe in the highest capacity of humans. A master teacher, he challenges people to deeper reflection on what they are doing and why they are doing it. He playfully and purposefully invites others into the deeper meanings and joys of life. He does not insist that you agree with his beliefs or opinions, he merely asks that you listen to his stories and respond with your own.

Recently, Edmond visited Sacred Heart University’s campus in Fairfield, Connecticut, and his energy and upbeat personality were apparent to all. He seemed to embody the humble but increasingly generative human power so well-described by Robert F. Kennedy:

Few will have the greatness to bend history; but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in

the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation. . . . It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is thus shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.

While visiting Sacred Heart, Edmond reminded us that the meaningful life is one of thoughtfulness, generosity, and love, and he continues to do what he has always done: take enjoyment in each new day with all of its challenges and possibilities. All these qualities are on full display in his fascinating memoir, *La vie, passionnément*, published in 2004 in French. The Sacred Heart University Press is very proud to publish an English edition of this book, prepared by the author, because we see in Edmond Israel a living example of wisdom and hope in a world where both are desperately needed. *In Love with Life* is a wonderful and inspiring read, and urges us all to think in new ways, to love with depth, and to take action guided by those simple but ever-challenging and ever-rewarding principles.

Anthony J. Cernera, Ph.D.
President, Sacred Heart University

Preface

For many years a number of my friends kept on insisting and even harping: “You must write your memoirs. You lived in an interesting time, a great part of the twentieth century and (this is my personal addition) hopefully a quite extensive part of the twenty-first century.” I must confess that I hesitated consistently, primarily for two reasons:

First, there is a sort of nostalgia, of profound sadness, which penetrates me when I have to plunge into the past.

Then, probably the most important reason is that I am really lazy. It takes me a long time before I set myself to a task. But when I do it I become intensely immersed in my work. My natural impatience gets hold of me and I want the job to be done quickly in order to return to my natural state of laziness, a state when my grey cells keep on vibrating while I am enjoying the more futile moments of life.

It is my friend and interviewer, Raymond Flammant, who was able to dispel my hesitations and doubts.

The love of life is the engine which makes me function. It has been a red thread during the sometimes turbulent and perilous phases of my existence, which has also known moments of

intense happiness. It is the love of life which has allowed me to confront the challenges and the dangers, practically from childhood until today and hopefully tomorrow.

As a matter of fact, I have lived several lives.

First, a pampered child within the fold of a very compact family radiating warmth and affection. Then refugee, blue-collar worker, banker, and finally constructing a philosophy, which I call “New Thinking.” It was my father, who since my early childhood, ignited in me the urge and passion to explore the depths of all things, the passion to engage in the never ending quest of a true meaning. Thus I am some sort of an autodidact philosopher. At the same time my professional activities changed from factory worker in the United States by necessity into becoming a banker after the war in Luxembourg, all this by sheer coincidence and also by necessity.

Can I be a guide, some kind of a mentor for others? Personally I am reluctant in this respect. I am not very fond of pontificating, preaching morals and ethical behavior based on my own thinking and experiences. People tell me that the experiences of my life must necessarily lead to some kind of wisdom that I should share with others. I am not very convinced of this precisely because the environment undergoes constant changes, at an even faster pace in our time than previously. Heraclitus said “Nothing is permanent but change.”

I rather see the purpose of this book to engage in a dialogue in the mind, and perhaps also in reality, between the author and the reader.

In the first and second part of this book entitled “Dancing on a Volcano” and “Surviving, Living, Constructing,” I evoke my existence, sometimes dramatic, often dull. The third and last part, “New Thinking” consists of my reflections and thoughts for the construction of a positive and even promising future along the lines that I have already communicated in a number of conferences and lectures particularly to younger people.

The principle of my personal philosophy is based on what I believe is a law of nature. The arrow of time is pointing in one direction: forward. Our world is not static. We cannot return to the past, time is the builder of the future. I am convinced that this philosophy is important, not only in its intellectual dimension, but also in relations between individuals and nations. This philosophy should lead us to resolve in a positive manner personal problems as well as the problems of society. In our time one cannot establish a philosophy of life and existence which is not founded on the sciences of nature as they unfold at the present state of knowledge. Humanity is part of nature, a very specific construct of nature on planet earth. During the last fifty years the progress achieved in theoretical physics, in astrophysics, and in cosmology uncovers for us a new image of reality, "ein neues Weltbild," which should guide us in our behavior.

Science, neutral in its essence, is beyond good and evil. Yet it fulfills a very important social function. It leads us to dismantle preconceived ideas and should be instrumental in creating links and bonds between human beings of all cultures.

I have chosen for the greater part of this work the form of a dialogue between Raymond Flammant and myself. Furthermore, the last part will be illustrated by short stories, the very last one long rather than short, because through Omega I want to show what is wrong and could be improved in our society.

Dear Reader, you might think that in this book I am indulging in utopias. But don't let us forget that in the history of mankind the utopias of today are very often the realities of tomorrow.

And now, I wish you stimulating reading.

