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The legacies of
Albert Schweitzer
reconsidered



Edited by

**Izak Spangenberg &
Christina Landman**

Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae
Book Series 1

The legacies of Albert Schweitzer reconsidered

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EDITED BY

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■ Research Justification

This book on the legacy of Albert Schweitzer contextualises this remarkable intellectualist, humanist, medicine-man, theologian and Nobel Prize winner. This collected work is aimed at specialists in the humanities, social sciences, education, and religious studies. The authors embrace philanthropic values to benefit Africa and the world at large. The publication engages with peers on the relevance of Schweitzer's work for humanitarian values in Africa. The essays in the book stimulate further research in the various fields in which Schweitzer excelled. Its academic contribution is its focus on the post-colonial discourse in contemporary discussions both in South Africa and Africa at large. The book emphasises Schweitzer's reverence for life philosophy and demonstrates how this impacts on moral values. However, the book also points to the possibility that Schweitzer's reverence for life philosophy is embedded in a typically European appreciation of 'mysticism' that is not commensurate with African indigenous religious values. From an African academic perspective, the book advocates the view that Schweitzer's concept of the reverence for life supports not only the Biblical notion of *imago Dei* but also the African humanist values of the preservation and protection of life, criticising the exploitation of the environment by warring factions and large companies, especially in oil-producing African countries. It also argues that Schweitzer's disposition on ethics was influenced by the Second World War, his sentiments against nuclear weapons and his resistance to the Enlightenment view of 'civilisation'. With regard to Jesus studies the book elucidates values promoted by Schweitzer by following in Jesus' steps and portraying Jesus' message within a modern world view. Taken over from Schweitzer, the book argues that Jesus' moral authority resides in his display of love and his interaction with the poor and marginalised. The book demonstrates Schweitzer's understanding of Jesus as the one who sacrifices his own life to bring the Kingdom of God to realisation in this world. The book commends Schweitzer's insight that we know Jesus through his toils on the one hand, and through our own experiences on the other. It is in a mixture between the two that the hermeneutical gap between then and now is bridged. It is precisely in bridging this gap that Schweitzer sees himself as an instrument of God's healing. It defines Schweitzer as the embodiment of being a healer, educationalist and herald of the greening of Christianity. His philosophy on the reverence for life prepares a foundation for Christians to think 'green' about human life within a greater environment. He advocates aspects of education such as lifelong learning, holistic education and a problem-based approach to education. Finally, the book analyses both critically and appreciatively Albert Schweitzer's contribution to the concepts of religious healing prevalent in African Christianity today.

Izak Spangenberg & Christina Landman

Professors and Research Project Leaders attached to the Research Institute for
Theology and Religion and Biblical Studies at the University of South Africa,
under the auspices of the Church History Society of Southern Africa

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List of abbreviations appearing in the Text and Notes

ABH	African Biblical Hermeneutics
ABI	African Biblical Interpretation
AISL	Association International Schweitzer Lambarene
ASSAf	Academy of Science of South Africa
CERN	The European Organization for Nuclear Research
CSPiSA	Committee on Scholarly Publishing in South Africa
DoE	Department of Education
LHC	Large Hadron Collider
NOUN	National Open University of Nigeria
OBTLT	Ogba Bible Translation & Literacy Team
OT	Old Testament
SASRF	South African Science and Religion Forum
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
UNISA	University of South Africa

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Foreword

Academic theology is of immense importance to Africa, and especially to South Africa, where many forms of popular Christianity reside. Academic theology engages these manifestations of Christianity, and although academic research seldom reaches down to grassroots level, it provides important criteria against which religious behaviour can be profiled.

The year 2015 provided an important opportunity for academic theology to investigate the interface between academia, practice and context in the figure of Albert Schweitzer. Schweitzer was born on 14 January 1875 and died on 4 September 1965. The year 2015 therefore celebrates his 140th birthday; it also commemorates 50 years after his death. This presented a good opportunity to promote academic theology and to showcase some of the theological research that is being done not only at the University of South Africa where the editors reside, but on the whole of the African continent.

Albert Schweitzer was an outstanding New Testament scholar, an accomplished organist, a medical doctor and a philosopher on the nature of the web of life of which human beings were but a part. He received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952 for his medical work at Lambaréné in the north of the Congo (now Gabon) in West Africa, for his philosophy on the 'Reverence for Life' and for taking a stance against the development of nuclear weapons.

Which of the legacies, or parts thereof, are still relevant to Africa today? And which need to be reconsidered? What of his thinking and activities were enhancing to Africa and what was un-African and even harmful? Can his contributions to the fields of theology, musicology, education and philosophy simply be ignored as colonialist? Do they need to be reconsidered?

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With these questions in mind, scholars were invited to submit abstracts for a seminar to be held on 15 and 16 October 2015 at the University of South Africa. Here, about 20 scholars from all over Africa read papers on Schweitzer and the quality of his contribution to Africa.

The chapters in this publication are a selection from the papers which were read at the seminar. The chapters that succeeded in being published had been subjected to a double blind peer reviewed process, first by *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, and second by AOSIS. The aim of the publication is, of course, to engage readers and fellow researchers in reconsidering and reappraising Schweitzer's work. Secondary aims are to stimulate research in the different fields in which Schweitzer excelled, and to centralise academic theology in contemporary discussions both in South Africa and in the rest of Africa on relevance and post-colonial discourse.

The publication is divided into four parts. Part 1 reconsiders Albert Schweitzer's contribution to Africa from a post-colonial perspective. Here, Cornel du Toit introduces the topic by analysing Schweitzer's 'moral imperialism' as expressed in his reverence for life philosophy, claiming that Schweitzer subjected all knowledge to morality in a way reminiscent of the German Idealists. In the next essay, Pieter Botha comes to an opposite conclusion on Schweitzer's work. He highlights the criticism in Schweitzer's reverence for life philosophy on colonialism, pointing to Schweitzer's 'ethical mysticism' that is grounded in compassion, love for peace and non-violence. Idealistically, the fight against oppression and exploitation is that of the individual against political systems that have no reverence for life. In the last essay Menard Musendekwa takes an in-between position in acknowledging Schweitzer's criticism against colonialism, simultaneously subjecting Schweitzer to the same criticism for being racist in his evaluation and observation of locality.

Whilst the essayists in the first part deal with Schweitzer's reverence for life in ways that are either critical or supportive of (post-) colonialism, the two essayists in Part 2 give their full attention to the analysis of reverence for life. Amadi Ahiamadu, relying on his doctoral thesis, combines Schweitzer's concept of the reverence for life, the Biblical notion

of *imago Dei* and the African humanist values of the preservation and protection of life to criticise the exploitation of the environment by warring factions and large companies, especially in oil-producing Nigeria. Garth Mason authored the second essay in this section. He indicates Schweitzer's concept of reverence for life was influenced by the war, his sentiments against nuclear weapons and his resistance to the Enlightenment view of 'civilisation'. All of these factors, according to Schweitzer, led to a massive disregard of life even, and perhaps especially, at the political level.

Part 3 of this publication explores Albert Schweitzer as New Testament scholar. Three essayists reconsidered the well-known claim that Schweitzer remained stuck in the hermeneutical gap between the world of Jesus and the modern world. Lovemore Togarasei, whilst appreciating that Schweitzer has identified this gap, indicates how African Biblical Interpretation has taken over the values Schweitzer himself used to re-clothe Jesus' message within a modern world view. Togarasei argues that ABI has taken over from Schweitzer the notion that Jesus' moral authority resides in his display of love and his interaction with the poor and marginalised. This spirit lives on in ABI bringing Jesus to contemporary communities. Eben Scheffler, too, identifies with the Jesus of Schweitzer who went to Jerusalem to sacrifice his own life to bring the Kingdom of God to realisation in this world. It is in this realised eschatology of Schweitzer that Scheffler appreciates the work Schweitzer has done in Africa, and is still needed to be realised in today's communities. Andries van Aarde commends Schweitzer's insight that we know Jesus through his toils on the one hand, and through our own experiences on the other. It is in a mixture between the two that the hermeneutical gap between then and now is bridged. Van Aarde's interpretation that it is precisely in bridging this gap that Schweitzer sees himself as an instrument of God's healing, announces the theme of the final part of this publication.

In Part 4, three legacies of Albert Schweitzer are reconsidered, that is, Schweitzer as healer, as educationalist and as a herald of the greening of Christianity. Through an innovative reading of Schweitzer, Izak Spangenberg finds that Schweitzer's philosophy on the reverence for life was preparing a foundation for Christians to think 'green' about human

life within a greater environment. He suggests that religious vocabularies should shift from God-centred to life-centred, and traces this insight back to scholars who built on Schweitzer's reverence for life. Johan Booyse presents a fascinating essay on the educational insights in Schweitzer's philosophy on the reverence for life. He finds that:

without employing the modern nomenclature of educationalists, he advocates aspects of education such as lifelong learning, a focus on both pedagogy and andragogy, holistic education and a problem-based approach to education. (n.p.)

Finally, Christina Landman looks both critically and appreciatively at the contribution of Schweitzer towards the concepts of healing that he found in Africa, and concepts of religious healing prevalent in African Christianity today.

A bust of Albert Schweitzer has stood for many decades at the entrance to the library on the main campus of the University of South Africa in Pretoria. It is a work by an Afrikaans sculptor, Laurika Postma, with an Afrikaans inscription underneath which can be translated as 'Dr Albert Schweitzer, famous philosopher, theologian, musician, doctor. Born Elsas 1875, died Lambarene 1965'. In later years, this bust was removed – probably because of its connotation with Afrikaans and whiteness – and placed in the archives. This book, written by scholars from different universities in Africa, aims to reconsider Schweitzer's contribution to Africa from a post-colonial point of view. The authors are of the opinion that this is where he indeed deserves to be honoured and remembered.

Izak Spangenberg & Christina Landman

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auspices of the Church
History Society of Southern Africa
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Part 1

**The legacies of Albert Schweitzer
reconsidered**

Post-colonialism and the deconstruction of moral imperialism: The case of Albert Schweitzer and his ethics of reverence for life

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■ Introduction: colonialism, post-colonialism and new-imperialisms

To revisit the life and work of a historical figure such as Albert Schweitzer is not possible without being influenced by the outcome of two world wars, the history of Germany's colonisation of Namibia,¹ the history of post-colonialism, the response to modernism and the influence of post-modernism,

1. The Namas revolted against the Germans in 1903. The Hereros joined them in 1904. The Germans turned the revolt into a war that killed 54 000 of the 70 000 Hereros. In today's terms, that would constitute genocide. Today (2015) the Hereros in Namibia are accusing the Germans of genocide and demanding compensation (see Nolden 1998:132).

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present-day ecological theology as well as the continued history of historical Jesus research. Similar to the way in which memory changes as time passes in the life of an individual, so too is the way we remember figures from the past as influenced by subsequent history.

There can be no 'neutral' Schweitzer interpretation. Schweitzer's thoughts changed over the years, as is the case with most human beings. He was too considered to make one-sided statements. Those that may, at first sight, seem so are qualified by context. He contextualised and balanced such statements with self-critique and an appeal to our conscience.

African countries started to gain their independence in the 1960s. Political independence, however, does not necessarily mean economic, religious and cultural independence. It is not easy to explain the extent to which the African mind has been colonised and alienated from its 'true' self. The post-colonial challenge was the reinterpretation of identity, society and tradition. It took on the form of the refurbishment of indigenous knowledge systems essential to tradition and self-identification.

On the pervasive influence of colonialism Said (in Nolden 1998) stresses:

... that colonialism must be seen as an ideological complex that comprises the very idea of Western culture and its esteem of a certain kind of knowledge that is complicit with dominion. (p. 126)

With reference to the United States, Bush (2006:195) avers that ‘Cultural imperialism still operates at the level of popular culture, but also intellectual culture, in the control of scientific and academic knowledge and the definition of dominant academic discourses’. Language imperialism determines English as the language of education. American money – along with other currencies, all taking the form of aid programmes – has penetrated educational systems and contributed towards the shaping of elites (2006:195). Aid comes in packages that advertise a specific view of societies, individuals and the world. Globalism has to discriminate in reducing plurality to workable uniformity as it manifests in, for example, liberal market forces. But is any reduction of plurality to uniformity imperialist per se? The question is whether we should, conspiracy-wise, look for the imperialist protagonists behind all development and initiatives or whether we must consider such development as the way in which world culture is emerging. Bush (2006:189) considers globalism as a new stage in Western imperialism. In similar vein, subtle forms of neo-colonialism and neo-imperialism remain active.²

The issue is more complex than it appears on the surface. The flip side of the coin is that all minority groups, all minority points of view, all representation of minority religions, all

2. To what extent can Schweitzer be considered part of the history of colonialism and imperialism? Should his memory not be erased like the recent removal of the statue of Rhodes (on 09 April 2015) from the campus of the University of Cape Town?

minority languages and all minority cultures can accuse the majority of imperialism. Bush (2006:207) refers in this regard to First Nation struggles for recognition in Australia, South Africa, Siberia, Amazonia, South-East Asia, North and South America – the list continues. Such struggles relate to the discourse of universal human rights, multiculturalism and identity politics.

New-imperialism is linked to economic power. Economists forecast that, by 2018, China will be the leading global economic force. Will China, then, become the new imperialists? We are witnessing the increasing involvement of China in countries all over the world, especially in Africa. Bush (2006:215) believes that the West is gradually losing control and that the centre of the world system will revert back to East Asia (see Du Toit 2015 on Chinese impact in Africa).

■ Knowledge (truth) imperialism?

We are not blank slates. We are colonised by ‘truths’ instilled in us by our upbringing and that we identify with as part of the self. It is not an easy matter to ‘colonise’ someone’s mind. Human freedom comes to the fore precisely when we are coerced into believing something we do not want to believe. Religion is a good example. You cannot be forced to be converted into belief. To colonise someone’s mind is to ‘reprogramme’ it with new ideas. In an open society, various ideas may compete for acceptance. In the light of strong competition, the success of a

specific product may depend on the most convincing idea that eventually becomes the leading meme. Once again, this process is not necessarily bad. It all depends on what you measure it against. In an imperialist context, ideas are forced upon inhabitants (via language, education, the labour market, law, etc.). ‘Indigenous peoples are still faced with the dilemma of incorporating elements of modernity that they need to prosper whilst retaining their culture and identity’ (Bush 2006:208).

We are usually unaware of the ideas, beliefs, customs and habits we have acquired over the years as part of our identity. These may also be influenced and change abruptly. We make important shifts in our thinking, adopt a new ‘paradigm’, and make mind shifts.³ The growth process involved in learning new things is a normal part of life. The process of change does not always happen voluntarily or without conflict. Freeing ourselves from bad influences that handicap us is often not possible without violent confrontation.

Imperialism encompasses all sectors of life. It is also a mindset. Colonialism must be considered much broader than the invasion of a specific geographical area. It concerns the culture, identity, rationality, understanding, ethics and politics of the imperial subject. Economic and political imperialism is usually the most

3. A good example is Karl Marx who refers to the influence that the thinking of Feuerbach had on their group, how excited they were about his ideas and how, overnight, they all became Feuerbachians (Engels 1975:265ff).

conspicuous, but religious, academic, and scientific imperialism may function with the same fervour, exclusivity and hegemony. The Abrahamic religions are imperialistically minded. There can be only one God, one truth, one religion. Truth is imperialist per se and, as an idea, is founded on the notion of truth as one which stands in binary opposition to non-truth, fallaciousness and the lie. In the natural sciences, truth is provisional and can be overturned when falsified. Conversely, in fundamentalist religions, truth is absolutist, transcendental, revealed and eternal.

Postcolonial theorists have indicated that the divide between colonial and post-colonial may not be as clear as one may think. Neither does imperialism end with the disintegration of formal empires. Bush (2006:40) indicates that strategies employed during colonisation were designed to establish and maintain Western power and influence over the non-Western world. Many influences of the coloniser are assimilated and retained by the colonised in the post-colonial phase. Petras and Veltmeyer (2013:185) refer to the fact that, in spite of a long history of imperialist 'anti-imperialism', officially sponsored condemnation, exposés and moral indignation directed exclusively against rival imperialists, and so on, that the protesters often follow in the footsteps of the imperial powers.

It is not always clear what is bad about colonial institutions and administrative structures, especially if they seem to work well. Neither is it easy to adapt institutions and organisations to

traditional systems. Is medicine, engineering or agriculture colonial? Are they imperialist? The economic realm forms another example. Market principles determine success and ideological, political and cultural interventions are considered bad news for economic growth.

Western civilisation was built on Classicism and Christianity. Civilisation and religion were two of the main reasons justifying colonialism and both were pitted against the barbarism and paganism of the colonised (see Bush 2006:24, 28). Colonialism and modernism go hand in hand. Bush (2006:87) says that colonialism was ‘universalising in its assumptions about culture and modernity’. In Australia and Canada, the assimilation of indigenous peoples into white culture was seen as the modern solution to the problem of ‘weak’ culture.

The concept of knowledge imperialism, or academic imperialism, relates to modernism. In this regard, much has been written on Western power-ontology, based on a metaphysics of substantiality and unity. In this respect, Levinas tried to replace Western substantialist thought with relationality (relationship with the other). This is achieved by shifting the emphasis from totality (unity) to infinity (separation). Thought is governed by finitude and infinity. To Levinas, infinity is inherent in humanness (human life and human relations are ‘open’ and thus infinite). Infinity manifests itself in alterity: ‘It is understood as the alterity of the Other and of the Most-High’.

Western ontological thought is regarded as a philosophy of power that dominates the other (see Du Toit 2011).

The imperialist side of truth relates to one version of truth that must be upheld, studied, confessed and practiced. This was typical of truth proclaimed by the Christian church in the Middle Ages. Post-modernism introduced perspectivism. In the humanities, truth has a narrative, contextual, historical and contingent character. Knowledge production in post-modern mode no longer belongs to any single decision-making body. Internet 'truth' has become available to everyone, but in its overwhelming infinity, this 'truth' is accessible by none. Human knowledge duplicates itself every few months; knowledge is continuously updated and, in this mode, acquires futuristic characteristics. Knowledge has become intercultural, interspersed and inter-textual. Truth is a 'mystery' because it keeps on changing its face. It has become intercultural, cannot identify any single author and is no longer fixed on any single outcome. Knowledge production has taken on a life of its own. The anonymous global community of researchers and scientists all contribute 'mysteriously' to its findings. Literally thousands of scientists all over the world are involved in the research related to the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) at CERN (European Organization for Nuclear Research). We can expect that, in the near future, computer intelligence will match and exceed the range and subtlety of human intelligence. Robotic intelligence

will surpass human intelligence, instantly share their knowledge, and control the imperium of knowledge with all the potential treats that may go along with this. In future, the face of knowledge or scientific imperialism will change and challenge all humanity. The question then will concern who commands access and control of future knowledge.

Schweitzer was against any form of knowledge imperialism and came up for the right of the individual to think for himself (1953:171–172). He joined Kant⁴ in lamenting the fact that knowledge had multiplied to such an extent that no-one could stay abreast anymore. He was critical of institutions that thought on behalf on the individual:

By the spirit of the age, then, the man of today is forced into scepticism about his own thinking, in order to make him receptive to truth which comes to him from authority. (n.p.)

Schweitzer considered the ‘normal’ man as incompetent when it came to thinking. These statements were directed at Western man and not made applicable to Africans. Concerning the

4. Kant has already indicated that knowledge is a result of colonisation. Colonisation of space and time is inevitable where knowledge is produced (Goetschel 1998:322). The colonisation model is applicable even when knowledge is self-critical of its own actions. His own Critique implies that the production of knowledge can only operate within the limits of an epistemic model that takes as its model the colonisation of the world (of experience) (see Goetschel 1998:329). In the piece ‘the island of knowledge’ Kant elaborated on the island of truth and the false belief that other continents of truth can be found outside this island. The island of truth represents knowledge acquired through the senses. The sea surrounding the island with the promise of other continents symbolises the possibility of metaphysical or a-sensual knowledge.

attainment of a living mysticism which underlies reason he says (1947):

Doubts whether the mass of men can ever attain to that level of reflection about themselves and the world which is demanded by a reflective theory of the universe, are quite justifiable if the man of today is taken as an example of the race. But he, with his diminished thought, is a pathological phenomenon. (p. 92)

■ Schweitzer in context

■ What drove Albert Schweitzer to Africa?

‘Saint’ Schweitzer had been awarded the British Empire’s Order of Merit, election to the French Academy, the Nobel Peace Prize and elevation to sainthood by *Life* magazine. Opinion polls revealed that Americans believed him to be the greatest non-American who had ever lived, and dozens of articles about him were published in America with titles such as, ‘God’s Own Man’, ‘The Greatest Christian’, ‘Man of God’, ‘Man of Our Century’, ‘The Greatest Man in the World’, ‘The Great Men’s Greatest Man’ and ‘The Thirteenth Disciple’ (Davenport 1974:116).

Having decided in 1904 to become a doctor and to serve in Africa, Schweitzer dedicated 50 years of his life to treating Africans at his hospital in Lambaréné. The decision was prompted by his reading of an article on the needs of the Congo mission, published in a magazine of the Paris Missionary Society. He decided on equatorial Africa as his place of service and began planning to enter medical college. In his autobiography he writes (1953):

... I would consider myself justified in living till I was thirty for science and art, in order to devote myself from that time forward to the direct service of humanity. (p. 70)

He did indeed give up a lot: his position as professor at the University of Strasbourg, his organ playing, theological standing and the opportunity to follow a brilliant career in philosophy. With reference to his decision to go to Africa, and in a somewhat self-conscious tone, he writes (1953):

Only a person who feels a preference to be a matter of course, not something out of the ordinary, and who has no thought of heroism, but just recognises a duty undertaken with sober enthusiasm, is capable of becoming a spiritual adventurer such as the world needs. (p. 75)

According to Davenport, Schweitzer said that he was sacrificing nothing, and his actions were not motivated by traditional Christian beliefs, liberal or conservative. Indeed, Schweitzer claimed that, before going to Africa, he had destroyed ‘the portrait of Christ on which liberal Christianity based its appeal’, whilst at the same time he had denied the divinity and infallibility attributed to Jesus by the conservatives. More than this, he clearly condemned traditional Christianity for its ‘shallowness’ and predicted it would not survive unless it abandoned ‘the crooked and fragile thinking of Christian apologetics’ and adopted as a philosophical base his own ethic of Reverence for Life (Davenport 1974:116–117).⁵

5. Oscar Kraus saw Schweitzer as an ‘agnostic’ and Jackson Lee said that Schweitzer stressed man and life, and not God or Christ, as important. This is disputed by Barsam (see 2008:2).

■ **The question of race in colonial and post-colonial politics: the German example**

To understand Schweitzer’s significance in Africa, the German experience of, and response to, issues relating to Africans is important. Germany was a latecomer in the ‘scramble for Africa’, which was dominated by the French and the English. By 1893, the world had already been divided up amongst the European nations.⁶ In 1926, Hans Grimm published his monumental novel *Volk ohne Raum*, which refers to Germany’s absence from Africa. World War I precipitated the decolonisation of the German, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires (Germany lost Namibia) (Bush 2006:21; Nolden 1998:128).

The European colonial powers had different approaches to their colonies. This related to the way in which the imperial imagination constructed the colonial subjects. Reality imitates imagination. The mental image formed collectively of the ‘other’ determines our sentiment, politics and conduct. In this regard (see Campt, Grosse & Lemke-Muniz de Faria 1998:206) the social construction of blacks imbued them with symbolic significance. To put this in context, the work of Marianna Torgovnick (quoted in Michel 1998:143) may be instructive.

.....
6. Some of the most important German colonies in Africa (1884–1920) were: Tanzania (previously Tanganyika); Rwanda and Burundi; Wituland since 1890 in Kenya; Namibia (including the Caprivi); Cameroon (1884–1914) – after World War I, separated into a British part, Cameroons, and a French Cameroun, which became present-day Cameroon; Togoland (1884–1914) – after World War I it separated into two parts: a British part which joined Ghana, and a French one, which became Togo.

She has shown that the West depends for its self-understanding upon a 'generalised notion of the primitive'. This is a good exposition of what is meant by the 'colonised mind'. She traced the notion of 'the primitive' to academic and popular constructions of the non-European others. The following quote (Michel 1998) captures her impression:

To study the primitive is ... to enter an exotic world which is also a familiar world. That world is structured by sets of images and ideas that have slipped from their original metaphoric status to control perceptions of primitives—images and ideas I shall call tropes. Primitives are like children, the tropes say. Primitives are our untamed selves, our id forces—libidinous, irrational, violent, dangerous. Primitives are mystics, in tune with nature, part of its harmonies. Primitives are free. Primitives exist at the 'lowest cultural levels'; we occupy the 'highest', in the metaphors of stratification and hierarchy commonly used by Malinowski and others like him. (p. 143)

The British (Bush 2006:88) glorified the primitive and administered 'indirect' rule through traditional authorities, whilst the French favoured the civilised *assimilé* [assimilated] who could, in theory, acquire equality through French citizenship (the ideology of universal republicanism). The British stance induced separation (apartheid), whilst the French model proposed integration and assimilation, although this remained an ideal. The German approach varied according to the four main phases of German history: (1) colonialism up to World War I, (2) the Weimar Republic, (3) The Third Reich and (4) the Post-war Federal Republic.

Schweitzer was both French and German as his hometown, Günsbach in Alsace, was, during his lifetime, both French and German territory.⁷

The German colonial history and its aftermath illustrate the subtlety of the forms taken on by imperialism. The Germans lost their colonies after World War I. African migrants arrived in Germany between 1885 and 1918 from Togo and Cameron as a symbol of Germany's imperial greatness. They became stateless foreigners when Germany lost its colonies after World War I. The Nazis considered expelling them from Germany (up to 1935) but decided against it because they believed that the recovery of African colonial possessions was imminent (Camp *et al.* 1998:215).

Under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles (1919) in the immediate aftermath of World War I, Allied forces occupied the Rhineland. The number of black soldiers amongst the French occupational forces was between 14 000 and 25 000 (up to 40 000 according to the Germans). These troops were drawn from France's colonial holdings. The presence of the black troops lasted until the end of 1924.

The Germans defaulted on timber and coal deliveries, and French and Belgian troops occupied the Ruhr coalfields in

.....
7. Alsace, a French province fell into German hands in 1871 (The Franco-Prussian war causes French cession of Alsace to the German Empire, 1871–1918). After World War I, the Treaty of Versailles effected German cession of Alsace to France (1919–1940). Nazi Germany conquered Alsace again in 1940 and in 1945, after World War II, it was returned to France.

January 1923. The Germans, unable to resist militarily, responded with acts of civil disobedience, strikes and riots. Approximately 130 German civilians were killed by the black African troops during these events and this gave rise to passionate protest (see Camppt *et al.* 1998:209, 213ff).

The *Leipziger Tageszeitung* reported (quoted in Camppt *et al.* 1998):

What offends European sensibility in the use of black troops, is not their blackness, but rather the fact that savages are being used to oversee a cultured people ... with the degradation of Germany in the eyes of the colored, they degrade the race and with this, endanger their own reputation. (p. 210)

This introduced a media smear campaign against blacks that lasted until 1923.

Apart from this, some 600 to 800 Afro-German children were born during the French occupation. Miscegenation and bi-racial children were perceived to be a threat to the purity of the German race (Camppt *et al.* 1998:208, 212, 222). The Germans had to be tactful in discrediting French black troops because they could not afford to alienate the German blacks. The Nazi's introduced sterilisation programmes in the early phase of National Socialism to deal with the offspring of the black French troops. Africans from the German colonies were explicitly excluded to maintain good relations with the former colonies, with an eye on re-colonisation. There were other factors as well. Africans in Germany served to convince the international community that they were treated well. This was necessary against the backdrop

of Germany having lost its colonies because of, inter alia, Allied charges that they had failed to treat their colonial population in a civilised manner (see Campt *et al.* 1998:215–217).

During The Third Reich rule, blacks were treated ‘cautiously’ in anticipation of the German colonial programme.⁸ In 1939 the Racial Policy Office stated (Campt *et al.* 1998:221): ‘We refuse to uproot the Native by educating him in European forms of civilisation ... [We] refuse ... to snatch the Native from his home and bring him to Europe.’

The third ‘wave’ came during the invasion of the Allied forces. An estimated 68 000 illegitimate children were born between 1945 and 1955 of Allied occupational soldiers (4800 were children of Afro-American soldiers). On the advice of the German missionaries from North-Africa,⁹ the Bundestag decided not to hand these children over to the Americans (Campt *et al.* 1998:222–223).

8. In this regard it is instructive to note Schweitzer’s fulmination against nationalism and patriotism. He sees patriotism as barbarism, and motivates: ‘... it does, indeed, announce itself to be such by the purposeless wars which it necessarily brings in its train’ (1947a:49). His remarks sounded a prophetic warning against the rising nationalism that preceded World War II in Germany. On nationalism he remarks: ‘What is nationalism? It is an ignoble patriotism, exaggerated till it has lost all meaning, which bears the same relation to the noble and healthy kind as the fixed idea of an imbecile does to normal conviction’ (1947a:48). Nationalism has distorted the idea of civilisation by claiming it in the idea of national civilisation, which Schweitzer regarded as unhealthy (1947a:53). It was a matter of propaganda and export (1947a:55).

9. The missionaries stated that the ‘the half-castes were despised by both Europeans and blacks’ (Campt *et al.* 1998:223).

The German experience encapsulates many of the possible race-related stances: colonialism and imperialism; the ‘usage’ of black French troops to humiliate the Germans; race as category of cultural identification; *Mischlingsfrage* [mixed marriages] and bi-racial children; German nationalism and Afro-German citizenship; fictions created around blacks (e.g. their numbers and influence) and the reality of their presence (Campt *et al.* 1998:208); the fiction that blacks would soon outnumber German whites (*Mulattisierung*) (Campt *et al.* 1998:213); the ‘use’ of black children to show that Germany had overcome her Nazi past (Campt *et al.* 1998:207); the issue of apartheid (*arteigene Entwicklung der Rassen* [development of breeds]) (Campt *et al.* 1998:221); and Africans being moved from the social realm to the symbolic (Campt *et al.* 1998:221).

The various German responses to their experience of Africans are important for understanding and evaluating Schweitzer’s stance.

Schweitzer’s relationship with Africans

Schweitzer was not a typical missionary, if he was a missionary at all. He did not pick up any of the local languages, nor did he try to understand locals through anthropological or ethnological studies. The lack of any in-depth African studies¹⁰ stands out

10. His 1950 book *Afrikanische Geschichten* includes anecdotes about his experiences and not an in-depth anthropological study.

against the great work he did relating to the Indians¹¹ and the Chinese.¹² In Paget's opinion (2012:279) he failed to gain the attention of Africans.

The 1994 film *Le grand blanc de Lambaréné* (The 'great white' of Lambaréné¹³) deals with 'whiteness' through a decolonised lens. It depicts Schweitzer as paternalistic, racist and insensitive to African culture. Paternalism is singled out in most Schweitzer critique. In Africa, as already alluded to, he did not pick up the indigenous language; he ran his hospital in an unconventional manner, refused to teach medicine to his assistants and treated his patients like children.

Schweitzer may not have had bad intentions, but his attitude did not sit well with Africans. Sithole (1962) comments:

The African interpretation of Schweitzer's regarding the African as a child is correct – namely, that Schweitzer deliberately reduces an adult African to a child so that he can justify the superimposition of European authority on the African. It is an insult for one man to regard another as a child. This attitude of Schweitzer is even more clearly shown in his 'elder brother' theory. (p. 107)

Schweitzer's reference to the African as his 'elder brother' was interpreted by many as arrogant and paternalistic. In this regard he says (Schweitzer 2006):

11. *Indian thought and its development.*

12. *Geschichte des chinesischen Denkens.*

13. In French Equatorial Africa, today Gabon.

A word about the relations of the whites and the blacks. What must be the general character of the intercourse between them? Am I to treat the black man as my equal or my inferior? I must show him that I can respect the dignity of human personality in everyone, and this attitude in me he must be able to see for himself; but the essential thing is that there shall be real brotherliness. How far this is to find complete expression in the sayings, and doings of daily life must be settled by circumstances. The Negro is a child, and with children nothing can be done without the use of authority. We must, therefore, so arrange the circumstances of daily life that my natural authority can find expression. With regard to the Negroes, then, I have coined the formula: 'I am your brother, it is true, but your elder brother'. (p. 85)

One could also interpret the 'younger brother' phrase as one of endearment of an elder brother who believes in and wants to help the younger brother to reach his full potential.

Sartre, who was Schweitzer's second cousin, picked on the notorious 'elder brother' sentence to brand Schweitzer as a paternalist and imperialist. Sartre wanted Africans to shake off Western imperialism by violent revolution, as he expressed in Franz Fanon's *The wretched of the earth* (1961) (Tody & Read 1998:109–110).

Schweitzer defended the right of Africans to education (2005b:335ff), but was sceptical (like the Nazis) of a Western education. He saw the wealth of the locals as lying in agriculture and handicraft. This did not mean that education could follow at a later stage. He simply saw agriculture and handicraft as the foundation of culture and not writing and reading (2005b:335).

A 'Western' type of schooling would benefit only a small number of pupils. If education had to be done, it must be accompanied by the 'acquisition of every kind of manual skill' (1953:150, 2005b:335).

Was Schweitzer's motive racist? He testified from his experiences in Africa that black people were no less intelligent than white people, nor less capable of hard work, nor less sensitive and that they were as deep thinking as human beings as were white people. Augustiny (1956) narrates the following:

... Schweitzer ... began to occupy his mind with the mental capacities of the natives. He had seen that the Negro missionaries were in no way inferior in intelligence to their white counterparts. The black missionaries to whom he spoke frequently were not less learned, nor were they less persuasive, than their white associates. He knew that, in America, Negroes had been distinguished as craftsmen, lawyers, doctors. Even here he had met natives with a high ethical personality. One of them, named Ojembo, has been immortalised for us in Schweitzer's African history. But a truly spiritual and ethical development among the Africans could take place only after they had been liberated from their present conditioning. (p. 103)

We must remember that Schweitzer was critical of colonialism and imperialism. Yet, his way of caring for and helping Africans implied 'parenting' the locals. This comes ironically to the fore in the same section where he defended their human rights.¹⁴

14. He discussed the right to habitation; freedom of movement (*freie Wahl des Aufenthaltsortes*); right to soil (*Das Recht auf Grund und Boden*) and subsoil freedom of labour and commerce; the right to justice (*Der Anspruch der Eingeborenen auf Rechtsschutz*); the right to live in a national setup and the right to education (2005b:328–338).

He discusses human rights¹⁵ in the essay on the relation between white and coloured races (2005b:325–338). He was strongly against any forced labour (1953:149) and justified controlled labour only when done in the interest of the public well-being (1953:150).

Schweitzer simply referred to the situation of the people he came to know at that time. He writes (Schweitzer 1953):

Have we white people the right to impose our rule on primitive and semi primitive peoples – my experience has been gathered among such only? No, if we only want to rule over them and draw material advantage from their country. Yes, if we seriously desire to educate them and help them to attain a condition of well-being. (p. 147)

What Schweitzer had in mind with ‘a condition of well-being’ was not arrived at through discussions with the locals – they were simply ideas based on his views and experience. As we have seen, he was not serious about educating local people.

The situation, however, was complex and different perspectives came to the fore. World trade had infiltrated communities and taken away their freedom. Locals slaved to make a few select people rich. Schweitzer’s response was an appeal to morality: ‘Our only possible course is to exercise for the benefit of the locals the power we actually possess, and thus provide a moral justification for it’ (Schweitzer 1953:147).

15. Schweitzer’s view on ‘animal rights’ was well ahead of his time (see his *Philosophie und Tierschutzbewegung* 1988:92–98).

This 'justification' prompted him to recognise the 'good' that came from prevailing imperialism:

It has put an end to the slave trade; it has stopped perpetual wars which the primitive peoples used to wage ... it endeavors in many ways to produce in the colonies conditions which shall render more difficult the exploitation of the population by world trade. (n.p.)

This is a very general remark and difficult to evaluate as the subject is simply 'prevailing imperialism'. The point, however, to take is that morals and the ensuing ethical spirit are, in his opinion, the only solution (1953):

Colonial problems, as they exist today, 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 natural understanding be possible. (p. 152)

Schweitzer (1953) strongly criticised colonialism:

But the most important thing of all is that we cry 'Halt!' to the dying out of the primitive and semiprimitive peoples. Their existence is threatened by alcohol, with which commerce supplies them, by disease which we have taken to them, and by diseases which already existed among them, but which, like sleeping sickness, were first enabled to spread by the intercourse which colonisation brought with it. (p. 151)

He ends his comment on the colonies even more strongly (1953):

Finally, let me urge that whatever benefit we confer upon the peoples of our colonies is not beneficence but atonement for the terrible sufferings which we white people have been bringing upon them ever since the day on which the first our ships found its way to their shores. (p. 152)

Davenport (1974:120), who met Schweitzer at Lambaréné in 1960, discovered that Schweitzer's views on colonialism were much influenced by his experiences in Africa and that they slowly, but perceptibly, changed according to the nature of these experiences. Concerning paternalism, Schweitzer referred Davenport to his work *On the edge of the primeval forest*. In this publication, he wrote that moral colonialists are men recognised by their subjects as attempting to be as ethical as possible given existing circumstances, who always recognise and atone for their unethical actions, and who possess the knowledge and ability to bring about material progress. Schweitzer believed that paternalism would be respected and followed by Africans, who possessed an 'unerring intuition' in that regard. This was Schweitzer's view during his 1913–1927 stay at Lambaréné. It was during his 1928–1938 stay, whilst grappling with the question of 'reverence for life', that Schweitzer, for the first time, began to view Africans as human beings rather than as patients (Davenport 1974:120–121).¹⁶ During the period 1951–1963 the actual political trends in equatorial Africa grew further away from Schweitzer's view with each passing year. The Africans were rejecting his political philosophy whilst the rest of the world began to see him as a spiritual hero (Davenport 1974:123).

16. He wrote (Schweitzer 1950:91): *Um den Schwarzen wirklich zu verstehen, muss man mit ihm in dem Verkehr von Mensch zu Mensch bekannt werden* [To understand blacks one must come to know them in a person to person interaction].

■ Reverence for life as ethical imperialism?

Factual knowledge is neutral. It is the moment at which we bring ethics and a value system into the equation that knowledge becomes more than neutral in the sense of good or bad. It is the way we claim and ‘colour’ knowledge for ourselves, integrate it into our value-systems, apply it socially and use it to motivate the exercise of power that tarnishes it. Knowledge was used in the colonisation process to distinguish whites as superior, cultivated, educated and civilised. Knowledge was the white man’s magic – symbolised by the book and demonstrated by the technology and weapons of the colonisers. Linked to all this were the desirable goods ready to be exchanged. It was not uncommon at the time to refer to Europeans as ‘children of civilisation’ and to Africans as ‘children of nature’, to give expression to the difference between educated and uneducated people.

■ Schweitzer’s ethical model as response to the philosophy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

Schweitzer idealised late Stoicism as well as the rationalism of the 18th century because both conceived world events as the expression of a rational ethical will. He idealised the value-based thinking of the *Aufklärung* and rationalism for the place it made for ethics. We must remember that Schweitzer’s ethical model

is a response to what he deemed the failure of the great philosophical models of the 18th and 19th centuries. Basic to his critique is his insistence that rationalism or idealism – or whatever model one adopts – must have an ethical impact on individuals and society and must present a meaningful world view that results in ethically matured human beings.

He viewed the Western philosophical systems developed during the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries (Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche) as the early fruit of the trees – not ripened perfectly and awaiting later development – and based his own system of respect for life on these (1947:89). One can infer that his philosophy was proposed as the ‘ripened fruit’.

A key element in Schweitzer’s thought is the distinction between optimism and pessimism. Optimism is a metaphor for activism, world-involvement, life-affirmation, ethics, teleology, progress and will to live. China and the West fit this description. Pessimism is a metaphor for detachment, self-denial and disinterest in life. Indian culture falls within this ambit (1946:177). Schweitzer takes his cue here from the work done by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche (1946:163–178).

In this regard, Schweitzer’s work on the historical Jesus and early Christianity comes into play. An optimistic world view is dedicated to this world, to life, to fellow humans. It believes that

humans can make a difference by changing the world as well as themselves for the better. A pessimistic world view (of which the Indian one is an example) has a world-denying ethic and negates and flees the world. A pessimistic world view also goes along with dualism in which another world or reality is seen as the authentic reality.

Jesus had, says Schweitzer, a pessimistic world view. He expected the imminent end of the world. This outlook is paradoxically balanced by the ethics of Jesus urging brotherly love and self-devotion to others which also makes this world view activist and, therefore, optimistic as well (see 1946:65, 67). The early Christian conception of the Kingdom of God was pessimistic and, thanks to Augustine, prevailed through the Middle Ages (1946:63). This was the case until the advent of modernism (in the 16th century and coincidental with the science revolution) during which Christianity, without realising it, surrendered its original character. 'The modern man, then, becomes optimistic, not because deepened thought has made him understand the world... but because discovery and invention have given him power over the world' (1946:63). Western philosophy struggled for an optimistic outlook on life (1946:12). Materialism shook the position of optimism (1946:13). Pessimism is depreciated will to live (1946:15).

We briefly reflect on Schweitzer's evaluation of the great idealists and how he relativised their thoughts in preparation

for his ethical model. He finds their thinking ethically insufficient, and this prepares the way for his own model.

Kant lives in the optimistic-ethical world view of rationalism. The character of the moral can be preserved only if we make it an end in itself and not merely a means to an end. Schweitzer considers Kant's great discovery to be the insight that ethics raises us above ourselves, frees us from the senses and attaches us to a higher world order. Kant fails to work this out, according to Schweitzer. He should have, in Schweitzer's view, given the moral order a universal content, an absolutely binding principle of conduct – which is what Schweitzer's own maxim of 'respect for life' would be (see 1946:105–106). To give the moral order a universal content, as envisaged by Schweitzer, makes ethics imperialist. Kant used ethics to raise to certainty those elements of the non-sensible world which are of value for the optimistic ethical world view: the ideas of God, ethical freedom of the will and immortality (1946:110). Kant's ethical philosophy fails because he links his ethics to his epistemological idealism, which depreciates the reality of the empirical world (1946:112, 126). Remember that Schweitzer stresses the real world.

Fichte wanted to overcome the dualisms in Kant's thought. The moral law and the material world meet in the life of the individual. The secret of the world lies in linking Kant's epistemological idealism and categorical imperative. Ethical activity subjects the material world to reason (1946:126–127).

Fichte's absolute ego is infinite will and creates an opposite (non-ego). The non-ego limits the ego which, in overcoming it, becomes aware of itself as will to activity. The world does not merely exist in my idea of it but is produced in me so that I may have something on which my will to the fulfilment of duty can exercise itself (1946:126, 130). It is as if the material world is merely a barrier for the infinite will to overcome through progress. This view obliterates, for Schweitzer, the difference between activity in itself (progress) and ethical happenings that render ethics meaningless (1946:131). The way he combines the categorical imperative and epistemological idealism destroys ethics (1946:131).

Hegel focused on truth before everything. The meaning of the world lies in the realm of the spirit which experiences itself increasingly in the development of man. The Absolute experiences itself with the world represented as thought (1946:142). Becoming one with the Absolute is an experience of the universal spirit of collective humanity when it has reached its loftiest height (1946:143). Much as Brahmanic thinking does, Hegel ascribes only an intellectual (and no ethical) meaning to thinking about the world and the Absolute (1946:144). The progress of spirit triumphs in Hegel's thinking (1946):

He is the creator of that confident feeling for reality with which Europe staggered into the second half of the 19th century without

becoming aware that ethics have at some point been left behind.
(p. 147)

Schweitzer relativises knowledge in favour of ethics. Knowledge comes to fruition in ethics. Knowledge must not be confused with thought. Thought is the product of rationalism. He sees rationalism as ‘... a necessary phenomenon in all normal spiritual life. All real progress in the world is in the last analysis produced by rationalism’ (1947:88–89). Based on rationalism, he followed the principle of founding his views of the universe of thought and thought alone as valid for all time (1947:89). Thought has not reached its goal, which is to establish an attitude towards life that is in accordance with its knowledge (1953:170). Knowledge comes to fruition in ethics. Grand rational constructs are worthless if they lack a theory of the universe, i.e. an ethics that qualifies one’s life as meaningful.

Ethics is the foundation of all thinking and action for Schweitzer (1946):

Of all the forces which mould reality, morality is the first and foremost. It is the determining knowledge which we must wring from thought. Everything else is secondary ... every age lives by the energies which have sprung from its thought about ethics (p. 22)

■ Imperialist ethics?

Reverence, or profound respect, for life and imperialism, are direct opposites. How can Schweitzer be accused of

ethical imperialism? It fits the infinite-Ego of Fichte. With reference to the work of Alfred Fouillée, Schweitzer (1946) says:

Self-devotion is, not a surrender of the self, but a manifestation of its expansion. The man who analyses himself more deeply learns by experience that the highest life-affirmation comes about, not by the natural will-to-live simply rising into will-to-power, but by its 'expanding'. Act towards others as if you become conscious of them at the same time as you become conscious of yourself. (p. 185)

'Will to live' is will to power and exerting this power over other lives may become imperialist! 'Will to live' is not by nature altruistic, and often excludes the will to live of the other. Will to live equates into respect for my life but not into respect for all life.

Once again Schweitzer was influenced by the thinkers of his time. His ideas are his response to the ethical systems of the German idealists. He wanted to change the world in a way similar to the way in which Marx wanted to change Hegel's 'standing-on-its-head ethics' by turning it back on its feet. Schweitzer (1946) said:

Our world will not get upon its feet again till it lets the truth come home to it that salvation is not to be found in active measures but in new ways of thinking. (p. 202)

He provided that thinking which was materialised by his work at Lambaréné.

Schweitzer was an idealist. He wanted to change civilisation. To Schweitzer, ethics had collapsed in his day because people

did not think (1946:22). If people did think they would ask basic questions about world view. World view determines your civilisation. To think about world view is basically the philosophical (and religious) question about life's meaning. Why we are here, how we must live and so on. Schweitzer frames these questions to fit the answer he has ready, namely that reality-based ethics determines thought and can answer the question of the meaning of life. The content of this ethic, which can be found inside each individual, is the will to live. An ethics of respect for life can be the only answer out of the deadlock of thinking or philosophy.

The title of his book *Decline and restoration of civilisation* is telling. Decline refers to the decadence of his world and restoration depends upon the acceptance of his ethical model. He says (1947:102) in *The decay of civilisation* that reflection on the meaning of life (i.e. his interpretation of it) would change the way people live (1947):

If such reflection should again come into being amongst us, the ideals, born of vanity and passion, which now flowers in rank profusion like evil weeds among the convictions of the generality of people, would infallibly wither and die. (p. 102)

Civilisation has collapsed and it is not only because of the war (World War I). Progress and technical achievements (including materialism and scientific materialism) contributed to this (1947:4–5). He subjugated material progress to moral ethical progress (see Davenport 1974:126). He considered his age as no

longer possessing a world view and 'from this deficiency comes our lack of civilisation' (Davenport 1974:9). He sees progress as the great inhibitor of moral advance which caused the inwardness of the individual to come to a standstill (Davenport 1974:12). Since the secret of the universe, namely the will to live, can be discovered only by individuals inside themselves, this will not be possible if their 'inwardness' – their life of inner thought – does not exist.

Ethics represented for Schweitzer the foundation of civilisation (1947:vii). He is not shy to claim that he will be the one to develop a new theory of the universe on which a new civilisation can be built: 'I proclaim myself the champion' (1947:viii). He elaborated under the heading 'Civilisation and theories of the universe' (p. 80ff) what he understands by a theory of the universe. It is clear that it refers to some master narrative that encapsulates the meaning of life. He says: 'The future of civilisation depends on our overcoming of the meaninglessness and hopelessness which characterise the thoughts and convictions of men today...' (1947:xi). A theory of the universe can act as foundation for a civilisation if it is the product of thought. This product of thought must be a spiritual power that affects all of mankind (1947:86). This spiritual power must be related to the basic ethical character of civilisation connected to the theory of the universe (1947:x–xi). He considers his system as having universal validity (and in this

sense it is imperialist). Schweitzer dismissed the *Weltanschauung* [world view] of his day as superficial and wanted to develop an authentic world view (he talks of a theory of the universe) based on ethics.

It is the individual (read Schweitzer) that will 'save' civilisation from its lamentable state (1947):

... that is why it is the duty of individuals to rise to a higher conception of their capabilities and undertake again the function which only the individual can perform, that of producing new spiritual-ethical ideas. (p. 74)

Schweitzer considered his ethics to be optimistic. From this originates '... activity directed at the improvement of the living conditions of individuals, of society, of nations and of humanity, and from it spring the external achievements of civilisation ...' (1947:94).

Ethical hegemony surpasses other forms of control because it occupies the moral higher ground. This has been, in many respects, one of the secrets of religious domination over the ages. It is difficult to oppose ethical hegemony because it appeals to human conscience, makes us feel guilty and seemingly represents the good. The ethical maxim that Schweitzer used as basis for civilisation and as the ultimate meaning of life is the will to live and respect for life. But spelled out, this maxim would result in Schweitzer's style of living and not that of the general populace. Ethical hegemony, however, dominates by 'justifying' other injustices such as paternalism. It is the parent,

the priest, the white man who fill this parental incumbency by representing 'what is right' and 'taking responsibility' to maintain the correct order of things. If we let go of the basic order of right and good, the backbone of society collapses.

The ruling class usually represents the good. This can be seen in the importance for the white man in Africa to be a good man. The good man brings the development, consumer goods, medicine, the gospel; all based on what is good. When we follow what is good we shall also prosper. The Nazis had such 'good' reasons why black people should not be given a Western education. Schweitzer preferred handicraft and agriculture for the locals instead of Western training because that was also in their 'best interest'. The moral justification of paternalism is always 'it is in your best interest'. If we dissect this carefully, it is often in the best interest of the one who makes these rules and appeals to these ethics. It is one thing to say that we all have the will to live. What this living entails, what the definition of the right style of living entails and who determines that is crucial but not answered, at least not directly. Schweitzer tried to link his ethics of reverence for life to everyday practical economic realities. He says: 'Only through reverence for life can we attain the standards of economic justice, about which we have to come to an understanding with each other' (Schweitzer 1946:273). Human greed usually proves to be a major obstacle in this regard. That is why Schweitzer needed to add spirituality to the equation in the hope that it would open our eyes (Schweitzer 1946):

In no sort of struggle is it possible to avoid becoming ruinous to one another by economic or physical power. At best the result is that the oppressor and the oppressed exchange roles. The only thing that can help is that we renounce the power which is given us over one another. But that is an act of spirituality. (p. 273)

‘The philosophy of Reverence for Life follows from taking the world as it is’. The world as it is, however, depends on how we interpret and understand it, and this understanding is fraught with paradoxes. He claims (1953):

Reverence of Life brings us into a spiritual relation with the world which is independent of all knowledge of the world. We are no longer obliged to derive our life view from knowledge of the world... It is not through knowledge, but through experience of the world that we are brought into relation with it. (p. 157)

He talks about Reverence for Life as ethical mysticism which brings rationalism to its conclusion! (1953:158). Knowledge is subjugated to ethics. In the same way world view is subjugated to life view. Life view overrides world view and all profound world view is mysticism (1946:xvi, xvii). This is because life view relates to the will to live. Will to live is an inner reality, a more reliable form of knowledge than knowledge affirmed by the empirical world and makes us, through intuition, aware of the thing in itself (as will to live) (Barsam 2008:7). It is interesting that the ethics based on the will to live is, in Schweitzer’s mind, something natural that we must discover or rather simply recognise, experience and implement. It is not a ‘higher’ level of morality that you advance to, and it has nothing

to do with evolutionary development. Applied to civilisation, he said (1946):

Civilisation, then, is not a phenomenon of any world-evolution, but an experience of the will-to-live within, which it is neither possible nor necessary to bring into relation with the course of nature as we know it from the outside. (p. 266)

■ Evaluation

Schweitzer can be typified as condescending but he is compassionate as well. He is paternalist and caring. He cannot be accused of misusing the locals and he was critical of all who did. He was ahead of contemporaries in criticising any form of abuse and he promoted human rights.

As is the case with great men, opinions differ. Marshall (1966) expresses it as follows:

Schweitzer may be tyrannical, arbitrary and a fuss-pot, but his accomplishment has elements of the titanic. No one can take away several aspects of his greatness as a 'universal man'. (p. 44)

Schweitzer did for the humanities what Einstein did for physics. He drew media attention and interested colleagues from all over the world to his Lambaréné.

In paying *Dankesgabe* [homage] to Schweitzer, Karl Barth relativised, to some extent, the work German theologians were busying themselves with (demythologisation; the historical Jesus quest; discussions of Baptism; Eucharist and Kerugma and Mythos; the legacy of Bonhoeffer) in the light of

Schweitzer's work that focussed on the sick, hungry and needy (Barth 1967:51).

Schweitzer relativised knowledge and elevated ethics. This makes sense only if one has already acquired this knowledge. Applying this to Africans meant that Schweitzer saw no need for education and training, but he maintained the importance of ethics. In romantic tone he notes (Schweitzer 1987):

Hence the difference between learned and unlearned is entirely relative. The unlearned man who, at the sight of a tree in flower, is overpowered by the mystery of the will-to-live which is stirring all round him, knows more than the scientist who studies under the microscope or in physical and chemical activity a thousand forms of the will-to-live, but, with all his knowledge of the life-course of these manifestations of the will-to-live, is unmoved by the mystery that everything which exists is will-to-live while he is puffed up with vanity at being able to describe exactly a fragment of the course of life. (n.p.)

To experience so much suffering amongst people totally dependent on others for help and to become involved in relieving this suffering must significantly influence one's way of looking at the world. To have experienced the two greatest wars in the history of humankind cannot but influence one's thinking. Schweitzer was a child of his time.

He has insight in his own makeup (Schweitzer 1953):

Two perceptions cast their shadow over my existence. One consists in my realisation that the world is inexplicably mysterious and full of suffering; the other in the fact that I have been born into a period of spiritual decadence in mankind. (p. 170)

These realities inevitably led him to formulate his Reverence for Life ethics.

The final irony of Schweitzer's life Davenport (1974:127) finds in the fact that, from 1961 until 1965 when he died, most African leaders were evolving political philosophies similar to Schweitzer's moral paternalism. He mentions Touré's *Democratic Centralism* and Senghor's *African Socialism* as examples of rule by a morally responsible elite who wanted to postpone political freedom until a firm economic base, and a sense of unity with other Africans had been established.

One could overlook his paternalism and focus on his spirit of compassion as Cousins (1961) does:

The point about Schweitzer is that he brought the kind of spirit to Africa that the dark man hardly knew existed in the white man. Before Schweitzer, white skin meant beatings and gunpoint rule and the imposition of slavery on human flesh. If Schweitzer had done nothing else in his life than to accept the pain of these people as his own, he would have achieved eminence. (p. 154–155)

There are those who scavenge on the plight of the poor to draw attention to themselves as liberators. They must be exposed for what they are: self-seeking egoists, 'duplicating the *ego* in the *non-ego* to overcome it'. The aim is not to make all aid work suspect. The underlying motive remains respect for life. 'Respect for life', especially when directed at *les misérables*, means to aid in a whisper and not to proclaim your good deeds from the rooftops. Aid to those in need cannot be used to justify our ethical system.

■ Chapter 1: Summary

Albert Schweitzer's ethics of 'reverence for life' can be interpreted as an example of knowledge imperialism that was developed into a moral imperialism. Schweitzer subjugated knowledge to ethics. In his view, civilisation can only be founded upon ethics. He wove a mysticism related to the will to live and respect for life into his ethics of reverence for life, and it was these ethics that came to be the basis of a new civilisation he championed and which he saw as the final destination (goal) of humankind. The author revisits German policies regarding Africans to contextualise the ideas of Schweitzer. He discusses Schweitzer's paternalism and how it impacted on Africans, and the way his ethics depend on the thought of the German idealists. His ethics, typified as imperialist, are tacitly proposed as the basis of real civilisation and acquire, in this sense, Universalist traits.

Considering Albert Schweitzer's legacy: Ethical mysticism and colonialism

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■ Introduction

Although he has been described as 'Christ's thirteenth apostle' (Freyer 1982:216; Schütz 1966:57), 'one of the greatest Christians of the early twentieth century' (Davies 2005:134) and as one with almost incomparable moral influence (by none less than Albert Einstein – Hermann 1994:359), Albert Schweitzer's legacy has been scorned as 'colonialist' since the 1960s, mostly by sceptical

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journalists and African critics who never really engage with his work (e.g. Cameron 1978:152–174; Randal 1963).

The term ‘colonialism’ is mainly used to describe the process of European settlement and political control over the rest of the world, including the Americas, Australia, and parts of Africa and Asia. There is a difference between colonialism and imperialism, but given the difficulty of consistently distinguishing between the two terms – in that both terms refer to the practice of the subjugation of people – I will use colonialism as a broad concept for the project of European political domination from the 16th to the twentieth centuries that ended with the national liberation movements of the 1960s (Kohn 2014:3).

Colonialism is a relationship between an indigenous (or forcibly imported) majority and a minority of foreign invaders: the *imposition* of political control by one country over another separate territory. The fundamental decisions affecting the lives of the colonised people are made and implemented by the colonial rulers in pursuit of interests that are often defined in a distant metropolis. Rejecting cultural compromises with the colonised population, the colonisers are convinced of their own superiority and their ordained mandate to rule (Osterhammel 2005:16). Colonialism involves political and economic control, following from and maintained by violent conquest.

Albert Schweitzer was never interested in setting up a political system and he never supported any forms of political conquest,

so in this discussion, only aspects of Schweitzer's heritage (his philosophy) relating to violence, exploitation, subordination and social hierarchy will be touched on.

■ Schweitzer the colonialist?

It is unsettling to learn about any accusation of Schweitzer being colonialist and racist. Schweitzer is a harsh critic of colonialism (Schweitzer 2005a:76–80; a sermon delivered on 06 January 1905):

Oh, this 'noble' culture of ours! It speaks so piously of human dignity and human rights and then disregards this dignity and these rights of countless millions and treads them underfoot, only because they live overseas or because their skins are of different color or because they cannot help themselves. This culture does not know how hollow and miserable and full of glib talk it is, how common it looks to those who follow it across the seas and see what it has done there, and this culture has no right to speak of personal dignity and human rights ... I will not enumerate all the crimes that have been committed under the pretext of justice. People robbed native inhabitants of their land, made slaves of them, let loose the scum of mankind upon them. Think of the atrocities that were perpetrated upon people made subservient to us, how systematically we have ruined them with our alcoholic 'gifts', and everything else we have done ... We decimate them, and then, by the stroke of a pen, we take their land so they have nothing left at all ... If all this oppression and all this sin and shame are perpetrated under the eye of the German God, or the American God, or the British God, and if our states do not feel obliged first to lay aside their claim to be 'Christian' – then the name of Jesus is blasphemed and made a mockery ... And now, when you

... speak about missions, let this be your message: We must make atonement for all the terrible crimes we read of in the newspapers. We must make atonement for the still worse ones, which we do not read about in the papers, crimes that are shrouded in the silence of the jungle beings. (n.p.)

Some of the sharpest denunciations of Schweitzer are done without any clear understanding (or even in ignorance) of his writings, both academic and popular. During his travels in Africa Fernandez also noticed this (Fernandez 1964):

Often this vituperation [*of Schweitzer*] was excessive and we were bound to defend the Doctor. Few of his detractors had read anything he has written or followed the awesome parabola of his life. Few had alleviated the suffering of a single one of their fellow beings. (p. 547)

However, Fernandez then continues his discussion of Schweitzer by arguing that, despite his fame and peace efforts, the great man was, at heart, a colonialist bigot. Although Fernandez at least read a couple of Schweitzer's publications, it was during a brief stay at Lambarene (a few days, 1958) that Fernandez claims he perceived a discrepancy between Schweitzer's *talk* of reverence for life and a *negative* view of African lives (Fernandez 1964):

The explanation we ... assigned for this disparity was a colonial one: Schweitzer and his hospital were lingering remnants of an old colonial society in which the relationships with Africans were fixed in domination and subordination, greatly limited by strong feelings of superiority and inferiority, and supported by such categories as 'primitive' and 'civilized'. We, on the other hand, felt post-colonial and anxious to understand Africans by approaching them directly and with flexibility, without benefit of such categories of prejudgement.

What shocked us about Schweitzer was how colonial he seemed. It was summed up in his refusal to learn any African language, invite Africans to his table, make any more than casual if penetrating observations upon the life of the people he ministered to. One would have thought it was, if not an act of simple humanity, at least a doctor's responsibility to know as much as possible of the life history of those he serves. (p. 549)

The critique is extended by Fernandez by claiming that Schweitzer's ethical theory is inconsistent and impractical, and that Schweitzer never questions his own colonialist motives. Fernandez makes a great point about those who claim moral success (Fernandez 1964):

Moral acts in a pluralistic world frequently have unexpected consequences, not the least of which may be the immorality of those who embarked upon a moral course of action in the first place. Thus the situations in which well-intentioned men place themselves may yet separate them from their most serious convictions. By becoming aware of the contradictions involved in our own sincerities we can perhaps avoid being taken in by them. (p. 562)

Thus, for Fernandez, Schweitzer may have claimed good intentions, but as a result of a heavy dose of self-deception the intentions are in fact nothing but a disguise for disdain and arrogance, 'like all true colonials' (Fernandez 1964:553). In summary, it seems as if Fernandez points out three 'colonialist' issues with Schweitzer:

- Schweitzer deliberately maintained social distance between himself and African people.

- Schweitzer's hospital – and thus his presence and work – was imposed upon African people; it is therefore (Fernandez 1964):
the perfect paradigm of the colonial situation whose hypocrisy it was to justify itself because of the uplifting of the natives, yet which never hesitated to sacrifice the natives to the good order and efficient organization of the colonial system. (p. 557)
- Schweitzer claims not to discriminate between higher and lower life forms but, in Fernandez's view he does, which to him reflects Schweitzer's racist bias. After all, 'one cannot consistently respect life yet attempt to ameliorate its conditions ... The hypocrisy of colonialism is that it lived on this illusion of benevolence' (Fernandez 1964:560).

When one discusses someone's legacy it is obviously important to move beyond one's personal perceptions (especially if based on a brief and indirect encounter). There are many (extensive) reports from Europeans and African people who talk about Schweitzer very positively, constructively (yet not uncritically) creating different pictures of Schweitzer. A number of historical corrections can briefly be mentioned. The Schweitzers (Albert and Helene) did attempt to learn Pahouin and Fang¹⁷;

.....
17. The two major languages of the area (Lambaréné) at the time. Schweitzer clearly avoided speaking in a language he was not skilled in. Despite his inherited bilingualism he was not a good linguist and never learned how to speak English. Helene emphasises lack of time as the main reason for not becoming proficient in these languages (cf. Mühlstein 1998:154).

they (and later when Schweitzer led the hospital on his own) launched several attempts at training local people. However, Schweitzer's life was not one in which everything he touched turned to gold; many of his projects that were quite important to him were never completed.¹⁸ What must be kept in mind is Schweitzer's own principle that one can do only so much. Schweitzer was first and foremost a practical man (Oermann 2009:55; Picht 1964:190)¹⁹:

The way to this heart of Schweitzer's activity passes through a heroic landscape dotted as though with erratic boulders and splendidly conceived examples of spiritual architecture. Some of them have never been completed, others have been left to crumble, because the centre of that landscape, the jungle hospital at Lambaréné, took up progressively more of his strength and energy. (n.p.)

Like us, Schweitzer had to choose between options: addressing one problem (for instance, sharing a kitchen and meal tables) often led to other, unexpected ones (conflict, low morale).

18. Despite his best efforts to complete *Philosophy and civilisation* in four volumes, the project remained incomplete; a source of considerable concern to him. He describes his philosophical work as 'unvollendet' and even chaotic because he cannot complete it (Schweitzer 2006:360; a letter dated 22 February 1959). His various attempts at training of local people never received the required time and effort from Schweitzer; eventually he gave up. Running a hospital in tropical Africa, and dealing with thousands of patients took up too much time. Before Africa, Schweitzer was also unsuccessful at starting an orphanage in Strasbourg.

19. Consider that Schweitzer built his hospital (literally from scratch), basically three times over, whilst dealing with overwhelming numbers of patients. Also, money had to be found – towards the end of the 1950s Schweitzer was raising about \$250 000 (about \$10 million in today's money) a year. He also donated his Noble Prize money to his hospital. All this took place despite the no small matter of two World Wars.

Some of his decisions may appear problematic today but they served to facilitate his aim of establishing and maintaining a hospital which served seriously ill people.

Schweitzer clearly cannot be fitted into any colonial (political) programme. Colonialist critiques of him focus, almost without exception, on *what Schweitzer did not do*. In this contribution, the focus is not on what Schweitzer failed to do, but rather to turn to his writings (including his letters and sermons²⁰) in order to contextualise and understand his legacy. His writings ‘form a whole quite astonishing in its compact homogeneity’ (Picht 1964:190), and also a remarkable guide to his life. In other words, this study is a brief exploration of what Schweitzer actually *tried to do*.

■ Contextualising

Schweitzer is famous for the phrase ‘reverence for life’. The meaning of the phrase is not self-evident, however, and Schweitzer was dismayed when it became a slogan rather than an invitation to explore his writings. The phrase ‘is related to a whole line of thought’, he insists, and it must be understood with regard to ‘the purpose and the meaning of my work as a whole’ (as reported by Cousins 1960:120).

20. Schweitzer was a prolific letter-writer and delivered sermons throughout his long career. In these writings, more often than not, we discover aspects of his thought that he really cared about.

■ To Schweitzer, philosophy matters

Notice the title he gives to the opening chapter of *The Philosophy of Civilisation: 'How Philosophy is Responsible for the Collapse of Civilisation'*. Nowadays, such a title prompts only cynical dismissals as few believe that philosophy can have any such cultural importance.²¹ Schweitzer believes it does. For him, the primary task of philosophy is to articulate values that give meaning to our lives and advance civilisation (Schweitzer 1959:xiv). He seeks to 'throw the belief in a new humanity, like a torch, into our dark age' (Schweitzer 1959:84). Ethics and morality need to be grounded in a particular world view, which is a philosophical issue: 'I therefore want to work in this world to help people to think more deeply and more independently' (Schweitzer 1998:223).

Schweitzer did not produce any political policies or a comprehensive programme for societal reform after colonisation. He was notoriously reticent when it came to explicit political designs, not least because he thought that involvement in potential controversy would distract attention from his ethical message (Paget 2011:119). However, later in his

21. Consequently, one thing Schweitzer *can* be criticised for is the problematic assumption that philosophy determines ethics: his conviction that ethical opinions are a cause in culture and history. A real question to Schweitzer could be, whether the reason for our lack of morality is one of *world view*? On these criticisms of Schweitzer see Russell 1988; Niebuhr 1925.

life, he sought in a variety of ways, particularly about nuclear armament, to influence political opinion. His philosophical ethics, as demonstrated below, can assist current attempts to reconcile life-oriented ethics with practices in social interaction. Our efforts at dealing with the effects and challenges of colonialism stand to benefit considerably from a better understanding of how Schweitzer sees connections between the formal and substantial aspects of morality.

■ Crisis

Schweitzer reasons that every civilisation, every culture, consists of the interaction between its material and spiritual aspects. Since the middle of the 19th century, the development of Western civilisation has tipped heavily towards the material element. This is, in part, the result of philosophy betraying its fundamental role and doing violence to reality. The vocation of philosophy is to be the guide and the guardian of general reason, but to Schweitzer it became clear that philosophy has abandoned this role and become engrossed in abstractions detached from life.

Colonialism has led to terrible events in Africa, but in Schweitzer's thinking that is part of the problem, as the exploitation and violence are only symptoms of the collapse of culture. Schweitzer explains his thesis of the decay of civilisation by emphasising the dependent economic position

of modern humans, whose work consists more and more of being the helper of a machine, rather than the other way around (Schweitzer 1959:38–48, 85–93). This growing economic dependence also means the increase of superficiality and indifference with regard to the spread of violence and destruction, both in peaceful times and in times of war. According to Schweitzer, modern society is in danger of losing its humanity (Schweitzer 1946:3, 1998:148).

The claim of the Enlightenment and of rationalism was to put forward ethical ideals based on reason; these ideals concern the development of the individual to true humanity, one's position in society, the material and spiritual problems that arise out of society, the relations of the different nations to one another, and the hope for a humanity that will be united in the pursuit of the highest moral and spiritual aims. Schweitzer never really gave up on these ideals. He began his academic career as a Kantian scholar and it is from Kant that Schweitzer adopted the basic presupposition that all ethical thought had to proceed from a reasonable principle. He lost faith in Kantian moral philosophy in the wake of World War I: 'at best, [*Kant's ethic*] can teach us a certain decency and justice ... [*yet*] when the time came for our ethic to be tested, it fell away from us' (Schweitzer 1986:9, 11). Schweitzer criticises Kant's *Zum ewigen Frieden* (Kant 1868; cf. Kant 2006) for, however ably the rules for treaties may be drawn up, they can 'accomplish nothing. Only such thinking as

establishes the sway of the mental attitude of reverence for life can bring to humankind perpetual peace' (Schweitzer 1946:300). Any political issue is, first and foremost, an ethical challenge; Kant 'fails to establish ... a basic moral principle with a content, a principle that will compel acceptance from deep and yet elementary considerations' (Schweitzer 1959:184). Kant had helped create an atmosphere of optimism regarding the progressive development of culture, but left this culture stranded in a transcendent realm that does not 'participate sufficiently in the structures of practical engagement' (Blanton 2007:143). Even well-intentioned (and slight) acts of violence lead to injustice and undermine righteousness (cf. Schweitzer 1949:9–10).

In summary, according to Schweitzer (cf. 1959:1–48) humanity faces an unprecedented crisis as contemporary *Kultur* [culture] relies on a world view which is no longer ethical; it has become unethical – or rather, a-ethical (without proper ethics as societies simply rationalise whatever needs to be justified²²); it has become overly materialist, inhabiting a *töte Geistigkeit* [dead spirituality] (see Schweitzer 1959:274–276, 1974a:202–204), and is violently destructive and exploitative (we have become 'robber states', Schweitzer 2005a:76).

22. Schweitzer repeatedly notes his disgust at so-called *Realpolitik*, the approbation of short-sighted nationalism and compromises with negative forces and reprehensible tendencies which will facilitate apparent progress, and limiting oneself to strive for what is 'attainable': see, among other references, Schweitzer 1998:146–147.

This crisis is the direct result of philosophies which misplace the quest for *real* knowledge and do not solve the challenge of real ethics. A spreading contempt for thinking and the lack of ethical ideals are the direct cause of the 20th century emergency (cf. Botha 2015b:241–242; Cicovacki 2012:3–17; Schweitzer 1965b:78). To solve the crisis, a sound basis for authentic knowledge must be found.

■ What is knowledge

The setting for Schweitzer's question, 'what is knowledge' is related to his rootedness in Kantian philosophy. That is, Schweitzer aims at overcoming epistemological dualism: how does the knower reach objective reality 'out there'. The context for this question is the 18th–19th centuries' confrontation of European cultures with other (or 'new') worlds and the other realities inhabited by the people of these other worlds. Amongst the plethora of languages, 'truths' and cultures – all considered 'final' by their respective adherents – how can one speak of *real* knowledge?

Schweitzer does not appeal to the authority of Scripture or divine commandments. Instead, he seeks a foundation for moral and religious claims in reason – within comprehensive and sound moral reasoning. And his solution is deceptively straightforward: knowledge is about *life*.

To explain Schweitzer's view of knowledge, it is helpful to start with Descartes's *cogito, ergo sum* [I think, therefore I am].

‘Surely ... that is the stupidest primary assumption in all philosophy’ Schweitzer (2009:156) notes. Furthermore, he states (1998):

Out of this act of thinking, which is without substance and artificial, nothing concerning the relation of [*one*] to oneself and to the universe can come. In reality, however, the most immediate act of consciousness has some content. To think means to think something. (p. 156)

The real starting point cannot be ‘I think’, but it must be ‘I live’: there is first of all a living, acting body which makes thinking possible. ‘I am life that wills to live in the midst of life that wills to live’ (Schweitzer 1998:156).²³

For Schweitzer, it is futile to begin thinking about thinking by starting with the subject-object duality. He wants to avoid that particular cul-de-sac by emphasising that knowledge comes into being because there is life. The ‘real’ things we actually know are those which we experience. What we indubitably know is that with which we are confronted unmediated; that of which we are already part of, namely the presence of life. He quotes Goethe approvingly (Schweitzer 1949):

‘In nature nothing is produced which is not in close relationship with the whole’ ... Thus, to give meaning to one’s life and ethical activity, [*one*] does not need to understand the meaning of the universe. It is by inner necessity, because it is part of one’s being, that one must be moral. (p. 79)

23. ‘*Ich bin Leben, das leben will, inmitten von Leben, das leben will*’ (Schweitzer 1966:21).

The keyword Schweitzer employs to characterise his epistemology is *ethische Mystik* [ethical mysticism]. By nature, every human has a mystic component (Schweitzer 2000:380), the 'life-affirming transcendence' of the empiricist's projection of the world of 'facts'. He solves the epistemological divide by means of 'ethical mysticism', the sense that ethical action conducted in the world overcomes one's inability to understand the world and permits one to be part of what Schweitzer would sometimes name a universal will-to-live and, sometimes, God (Schweitzer 1939:76). Being is a manifestation of 'eternal being', that is, of God and nature (Schweitzer 1949:76).

Consequently, knowledge can only be that which expresses life, serves life, enhances life, extends living for life, and when there is a conflict of world views and cultural values, the question to ask is not 'who knows the truth' but, 'what will enhance life' (Schweitzer 1959):

The ultimate knowledge that we strive to acquire is knowledge of life, which intellect looks at from without, will from within. Since life is the ultimate object of knowledge, our ultimate knowledge is necessarily our thinking encounter with life. (p. 55–56)

Schweitzer is quite adamant that in any political setting in which questions about practice or cultural preference are to be settled, we should be guided by 'reverence for life' (and not by majority vote or military might). This is the practical implication of reverence for life as a world view and how his epistemology leads to ethics.

■ What should one do (ethics)

Schweitzer (1936b) states:

All that is ethical goes back to a single principle of morality, namely the maintenance of life at its highest level, and the furtherance of life. The maintenance of one's own life at the highest level by becoming more and more perfect in spirit, and the maintenance at the highest level of other life by sympathetic, helpful self-devotion to it – this is ethics. (p. 260)

Schweitzer summarises his ethics with the well-known phrase, reverence for life. For Schweitzer, life includes humans, animals and plants, taken as individuals but also as interconnected beings.

Reverence for life, however, is *not* a romantic preservation of nature. First of all, it is an expression of ethical mysticism (cf. Botha 2015a:319–329), and simply protecting life is not the same as respecting it. Ethical mysticism gives it a cosmic dimension (Schweitzer 1936b):

Only a complete ethic has mystical significance. An ethical system which is only concerned with the attitude of man to his fellow-man and to society cannot really be in harmony with a world-view. It has no relationship with the Universe ... Only when ethics embrace the whole Universe is an ethical world-view really possible. And then only does it become apparent that the ethical worldview is ethical sacred (p. 259–260)

Reverence for life is a *complete* ethic. It is a universal principle, not to be watered down for particular contexts. It cannot be described in detail nor reduced to a simple formula, yet it can be enacted in everyday life. It is an ethic of creative force as opposed

to utilitarian compunction (Schweitzer 1961b:93). Schweitzer's definition is a modest statement, 'It is good to maintain and to encourage life, it is bad to destroy life or obstruct it' (Schweitzer 1959:309), and he illustrates it with some examples but deliberately refrains from circumscribing it with rules. He also avoids analysing cases in order to demonstrate which behaviours are to be preferred (Schweitzer 1962):

An absolute ethic calls for the creating of perfection in this life. It cannot be completely achieved; but that fact does not really matter. In this sense, reverence for life is an absolute ethic. It does not lay down specific rules for each possible situation. It simply tells us that we are responsible for the lives about us. It does not set either maximum or minimum limits to what we must do. (p. 187)

All forms of life surrounding one should be recognised; reverence for life may not be limited to human life: 'Ethics are responsibility without limit towards all that lives' (Schweitzer 1959:311). And, (Schweitzer 1959):

[a] human is truly ethical only when one obeys the compulsion to help all life which one is able to assist, and shrinks from injuring anything that lives. One does not ask how far this or that life deserves one's sympathy as being valuable, nor beyond that, whether and to what degree it is capable of feeling. Every life is sacred (p. 310)

True life-affirmation maintains the intrinsic value of all life (Schweitzer 1959:57); 'the mystery of life is always too profound for us, and its value is beyond our capacity to estimate' (Schweitzer 1962:188). Furthermore, he (Schweitzer 1965a) states:

The ethics of reverence for life makes no distinction between higher and lower, more precious and less precious lives. It has good reasons

for this omission. For what are we doing, when we establish hard and fast gradations in value between living organisms, but judging them in relation to ourselves, by whether they seem to stand closer to us or farther from us. This is a wholly subjective standard. How can we know the importance other living organisms have in themselves and in terms of the universe? (p. 47)

Reverence for life is logical (a ‘necessity of thought’), an inner necessity for anyone who understands that she or he is part of the will-to-life (Schweitzer 1998:153).

Although he emphasises unlimited respect for life, Schweitzer is *not* an adherent to the ideal of the inviolability of life. It is about *reverence*: not blind obedience to a law, but deep respect, appreciative esteem, *Gesinnung* [a mental attitude] (Schweitzer 1959:344), ‘a new temper of mind’ (Schweitzer 1959:83) which guides and develops one’s emotions, attitudes and relations. ‘Reverence’ is more than an ideal for one’s character, it should be a characteristic of human life, ‘being something which is ever present to thought, penetrates unceasingly and in all directions one’s observation, reflection, and resolutions’ (Schweitzer 1959:316). Reverence for life is like an ethos: the formation of attitudes and dispositions underlying ethical decisions and moral behaviour.

■ Understanding reverence for life as a world view

Schweitzer often said that it was his contribution of reverence for life that he considered his primary contribution to the world

(Schweitzer 2003a:xix), and the reason for this was because he considered reverence for life as the foundation of an ethical world view. So, rather than a political theory or an activist programme, Schweitzer wants to think about the issues of exploitation, oppression and government from the point of view of the individual and how life can be respected and developed. Reasons for political systems or preferences for government styles should be, according to his philosophy, an individual's argument in affirming reverence for life.

This is not to deny that perplexing dilemmas arise when the myriad demands of actual life situations come into conflict. Indeed, reverence for life adds complexity by elevating moral demands and widening the circle of moral concern to include all life (Schweitzer 1936b:261). In his work the phrase 'reverence for life' has multiple meanings: it indicates a unifying moral aspiration which is a versatile ideal; it names a comprehensive character trait, a multifaceted virtue, but also a foundational principle of responsibility which is a many-sided obligation. Reverence for life is furthermore Schweitzer's moral perspective in its entirety, an ethical theory with an impressive, wide-ranging applicability (cf. Bollnow 1988; Clark 1964:171–178; Musfeldt 1991; Polednak 1989; Rud 2011; Wellman 1977:46–48).

Schweitzer's insistence on the central principle of ethics as reverence for life is about restoring a sense of orientation in

a disoriented world, in the decay of contemporary culture. He wants to 're-enchant' the world which we nowadays treat as if it were a machine. Reverence for life strives to embed ethics into the essential concerns of life itself; part of the broader and deeper concerns dealing with humanity which is not abstract, lifeless or superficial.

To further explore aspects of Schweitzer's philosophy of ethics the following elements: compassion, peace and non-violence, will be briefly analysed.

■ Compassion

Schweitzer (1998) states:

I have never tried to withdraw myself from this community of suffering. It seemed to me a matter of course that we should all take our share of the burden of pain that lies upon the world. (p. 242)

Suffering cast a shadow over Schweitzer's life (Schweitzer 1998:223). It shaped his life plan, especially his decision to become a physician in order to provide medical care for Africans who had only 'witch doctors' to help them (Schweitzer 1998:73). It also shaped his moral philosophy. Compassion, understood as active caring in response to suffering, lies at the heart of his ethical mysticism – the unity with all life experienced in helping even one life. Compassion manifests amongst persons in what Schweitzer calls 'the fellowship of those who bear the mark of pain', but it also characterises the 'community of suffering' which exists amongst both human and non-human lives

(Schweitzer 1998:242). When the phrase 'reverence for life' became clear in Schweitzer's mind he thought not of Jesus or Goethe, both of whom had a profound influence on him, but of the Buddha, 'the originator of the ethic of compassion' (Schweitzer 1936b:102, 1961a:18).

Schweitzer's life and thoughts have inspired compassionate service in many others. One can, and should, honour his legacy for this reason alone. Keep in mind that in the course of time more than one-third of the population of Gabon would have visited Schweitzer's hospital either once, or several times (Munz & Munz 2005:199).²⁴ Schweitzer can be criticised for inadequate sanitary conditions and public health measures at his hospital, but he has also been praised, justly, for the innovative 'appropriate medicine' he developed by allowing families to stay with patients for support and to preserve tribal traditions (e.g. Berman 1986:9, 11, 86).

There is an obvious link between compassion and solidarity, but Schweitzer argues that the role of compassion in promoting human solidarity should be expressed as the fellowship of those who bear the mark of pain: 'Those who have learnt by experience what physical pain and bodily anguish mean, belong

24. Headrick (1994:270) notes the Gabonese population's preference for Schweitzer's hospital over government-provided institutions. Berman, a surgeon who worked with Schweitzer, judged that the hospital 'did a tremendous, if not a complete service' and noted that the surgical mortality and morbidity was very low, 'comparable to many plush urban hospitals in the United States' (Berman 1986:86, 87, 144). On Schweitzer's effectiveness as a physician: Brabazon 2000:248; Karefa-Smart 1992:57-61.

together all the world over; they are united by a secret bond' (Schweitzer 1956:128). Suffering creates a bond of reciprocal compassion, together with gratitude for having been helped. In this way, the concept of solidarity through suffering reflects the two dominant 'experiences' from Schweitzer's childhood, compassion and gratitude, which shaped his life and thought (Schweitzer 1924:73).²⁵ Just as our good fortune is a product of the goodwill of others, so we should help in expressing goodwill (cf. Botha 2015a:335–338; Martin 1999). Schweitzer argues that Western societies have a duty to help people living in impoverished societies. One basis for that duty is atonement (*Sühne*) for the harm caused by colonialism – but this atonement, despite the spiritual association, entails secular compensatory justice for damages and injustices. It follows that, for Schweitzer, missionary work should be about helping, not conversion; mission is 'a work of humanity rather than a religious one' (Schweitzer 2001:889, 2003b:317–318).

The atonement requires the provision of necessary aid and participation in reciprocal giving. Schweitzer argues that isolation from others' suffering prevents experiencing joy in their well-being (Schweitzer 1986:20). Joy and compassion are inseparable: to love is to be responsive to both the suffering and the happiness of others (Schweitzer 1986:20). As a virtue,

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 25. His concept of solidarity was developed during Schweitzer's severe illness while he was imprisoned by the French during the First World War as a (German) enemy (Brabazon 2000:301; cf. Schweitzer 1956:124–127).

compassion is active helping that includes emotions, intelligence and affection. Compassionate persons do not merely wait until they are aware of suffering; they actively try to prevent it (Schweitzer 1986:30). Cruelty – the ubiquity of violence in human societies – and the unheeding, senseless destruction and killing in nature cannot be understood, but human beings can, and should, emphasise their need to lead meaningful lives by showing compassion whenever possible. In his sermons, Schweitzer uses traditional religious terms to teach that personal redemption requires compassionate involvement in the lives of others. With regard to ethical mysticism, Schweitzer claims that one experiences unity with all life through acts of compassion (Schweitzer 1936a:228, 2009:156).

Schweitzer calls for active caring, but warns that compassion easily degenerates into sentimentality. Active caring deepens appreciation of what is important in life by strengthening one's sense of moral and spiritual community.

Of course, it is quite difficult to stay committed to the ideals of deep and active compassion. Schweitzer frequently comments on such difficulties and analyses several obstacles to compassionate caring, such as egoism, hopelessness and hypocrisy. His comments aim at improving moral motivation by interweaving self-realisation and service to others (Schweitzer 1959:107, 305).

According to Schweitzer, 'ignorant egoism' is the primary source of indifference to others' suffering (Schweitzer 1986:16),

but hopelessness is a close second source of inaction, if not indifference. It must be acknowledged that suffering is inevitable and that in our own lives we too add to the 'melody of pain and death' (Schweitzer 1986:18), but Schweitzer prompts us to discipline egoism and indifference because character and self-realisation are at stake. The alternative to compassion is callousness.

Hypocrisy is another source of indifference. One can deceive oneself into thinking that one is doing all that is achievable and then proceed with casual indifference to the suffering of others. But 'the good conscience is an invention of the devil' (Schweitzer 1959:318). There is an actor within each one of us who relishes playing the role of the magnanimous helper, whilst doing far less than is possible in alleviating suffering (Schweitzer 1986:42).

Additional obstacles to compassion include social decorum, hatred, envy, ingratitude and hiding behind narrowly-defined responsibilities (Schweitzer 1959:316, 1986:40). Schweitzer's calls for strengthening compassion are part of his reverence for life philosophy. His appeals are directed to individuals who want to adopt a proper ethics and want to grasp why we are in a crisis and how it can be dealt with. He assumes an audience already morally committed in significant degrees. He phrases his ethical theory as exhortations so that it can also be persuasive, and the strategy is straightforward. We should cultivate compassion and caring because doing so makes us the kinds of

persons who we aspire to be. Such a strategy will appeal to persons of goodwill, so reverence for life as a choice will elicit their natural tendencies of empathy, sympathy, compassion and self-realisation.

Schweitzer emphasises that compassion will only be strengthened by keeping ethical ideals elemental – simple, close to experience, rooted in natural desires, and responsive to needs for meaning. Reverence for life, as an ethics of virtue, highlights how we expand and enrich our identities by relating to others in caring ways (Schweitzer 1959:255). Schweitzer's philosophy can increase moral motivation as ethics become personal projects of love and caring in relationships, and by pursuing ideals of service. Such projects define one and what one cares about deeply. Compassion implies personal identification with the causes and individuals one supports as well as ongoing aid to others: part of one's good fortune resides in finding satisfaction in helping others (Schweitzer 1998:244).

Schweitzer urges us to find our own ways to serve, rather than emulating him directly: 'You can have your Lambaréné anywhere' (Brabazon 2000:200; cf. Schweitzer 1998:88). In Schweitzer's thinking, a spiritual pilgrimage is to serve others; he described his small jungle hospital as no mere hospital but an outpost of God's kingdom, *Ausdruck seiner Lebens- und Weltanschauung* [the very expression of his life and world view] (Oermann 2009:235).

■ Peace

Schweitzer (1924) states:

In our time, when violence clad in lies is sitting on the throne of the world, sinister as never before, I nevertheless remain convinced that truth, love, peaceableness, gentleness, and kindness are the powers above all powers. (p. 95)

That power, Schweitzer maintains, can be achieved only with a reverence for life philosophy. His *The Philosophy of Civilisation* ends with the claim that ‘only such thinking as establishes the sway of the mental attitude of reverence for life can bring humankind perpetual peace’ (Schweitzer 1959:344, cf. xii, 1, 45). Even when protesting against nuclear armaments in old age, Schweitzer insisted on the need for widespread inner moral change in order to achieve social peace, whether amongst nations, groups or individuals (Schweitzer 1988:40). Peace and peace-loving are central to the ideals and virtues emphasised in reverence for life. The love of peace implies a very strong stand against violence, but it is a stand that must be integrated with other important ideals, especially compassion and justice. Schweitzer is not an absolute pacifist.

No doubt Schweitzer’s approach to peace – and by implication to colonialism – is highly individualistic. By claiming that a widespread change of attitude is what is most needed to achieve justice and peace, he avoids discussing the importance of group action and negotiated settlements, even when guided by general

moral principles (cf. Schweitzer 1959:344). He insists that widespread changes in attitude are needed to prepare the way for new social structures and laws, even for international laws (Schweitzer 1988:76). Reverence for life is the means for humanity to realise itself through the actions of the individual within everyday life (cf. Oermann 2009:116). One of the things that Jesus taught us, according to Schweitzer (1964), is that:

individual and social ethics blend in the great secret [*of the kingdom*]; it is the 'performance of the individual' which leads to the community's 'accomplishment of moral renewal [*in preparation for the kingdom*]. (p. 255)

It follows that reverence for life must be taught and promoted so that it can be implemented, nationally and internationally, through social structures based on justice and compassion. He calls for a 'spiritual politics, to be pursued side by side with all political planning and acting. Such politics will create spiritual links among the nations' (Schweitzer 1965a:54).

Schweitzer decries the 'ignoble patriotism' that elevates one's country above all others (Schweitzer 1959:29), although he affirms the value of a 'healthful nationalism' within a broader framework of humanitarianism (Schweitzer 1988:54).²⁶ He emphatically rejects communism for perverting humanitarianism, just as he condemns fascism for perverting patriotism.

26. At the same time, he was not immune to the biases of nationalism. Edgar Berman (1986:183) observes, 'Germanophilia was a peculiar quirk in his otherwise magnificent mentality'.

The love of peace presupposes inner peace, and therefore reverence for life involves a fair bit of resignation.²⁷ Resignation, in Schweitzer's thinking, entails the acceptance of realities we cannot control, including our vulnerability to suffering and death. But some things are under our control, as the Stoics point out, such as our attitudes and values. Hence, resignation is a 'profound life-affirmation' that deepens self-respect and prepares us to care more deeply for other lives (Schweitzer 1959:313). Resignation will not remove all fear, but it frees us from incapacitating forms of despair, misery, anger and envy.

Resignation brings moral and spiritual serenity, the 'sort of happiness' which comes from knowing that spiritual values have genuine power, and from committing ourselves to their ultimate triumph (Schweitzer 1959:97). In contrast to the fluctuations and mutability of wealth, power and social status, knowing one is attuned to the good in the universe (part of life striving to affirm life) lessens one's chance of being crushed by outward events (Schweitzer 1974b:97). Serene acceptance is not passivity, but the calm surrendering of one's will to the beneficent forces in the world and feeling supported by those forces (Schweitzer 1974b:96). It is not a calm that serves violent ends, but the moral confidence that accompanies active commitment to social peace in pursuing the ideal of being peace-loving (Schweitzer 1936b:186).

27. About this, Schweitzer fully acknowledges the influence of Stoicism (e.g., Schweitzer 1962:183–184). For the role of resignation in Schweitzer's philosophy (Macquarrie 1971:146).

■ Non-violence

Schweitzer thinks about peace in the same terms with which he describes love: 'harmony of being, community of being' (Schweitzer 1986:7–8). Peace is the absence of angry conflict, violence and the threat of violence. Thus, the virtue of peaceableness implies the removal or lessening of hatred and anger that leads to violence, precisely by means of a willingness to forgive rather than to seek revenge (Schweitzer 2003a:159). The mere absence of conflict, however, is not necessarily positive. Pursuing moral and other ideals of character and excellence inevitably provokes cases of conflict, often healthy ones. Peace pertains to how conflicts are resolved: whether they are dealt with in compassion without violence and in search of justice, not to the mere avoidance of conflict per se.

By saying that the sacredness of life renders all killing bad, Schweitzer affirms an aspiration. He is not attempting to establish an all-things-considered judgment that killing is never permissible in any context (Clark 1964:107). Reverence for life contains a multitude of specific ideals that must be balanced and integrated in practical situations. Non-violence is highly important amongst those ideals, but so is self-respect (which can justify self-defence), and also justice and compassion, which can warrant the defence of innocent third parties. Killing non-human life is often necessary in order to eat, protect oneself, and save innocent human lives. Even killing humans, as an incredible last, desperate resort, can be necessary to protect

innocent persons (and oneself) against immoral aggression (Martin 2007).

Schweitzer is a pacifist in calling for active commitment to peace and non-violence, but he is not a pacifist in the sense of believing we should never defend ourselves and others by resorting to violence after seriously pursuing all other reasonable options. (p. 90)

Schweitzer's calls for world peace are not aimed at abandoning justice by having innocent people sacrifice their lives. They are calls for peace through justice, and justice sometimes requires defence of the innocent. Violence is to be used only when 'necessary' – to legitimately defend oneself or other innocent parties against immoral aggression. The principle is that force is justified only when 'unavoidable', as a 'last expedient', directed by 'an ethical aim', and 'applied in a completely ethical disposition' (Schweitzer 1936b:233–234).

The important thing (Schweitzer 1936b):

is not that only non-violent force should be employed, but that all worldly purposive action should be undertaken with the greatest possible avoidance of violence, and that ethical considerations should so dominate ourselves as to influence also the hearts of our opponents. (p. 233–234)

Note that his pacifism is based on ethical ideals rather than rules of duty and permissibility. Reverence for life constrains one by the obligation to pay intense attention to non-violent solutions to problems, to cultivate 'the strong desire to realise any plan that has to be carried out without causing any kind of injury' (Schweitzer 1949:10).

■ Schweitzer's legacy: ethical mysticism, reverence for life and socio-political issues

After this brief review of what aspects of reverence for life actually involve, Schweitzer's legacy can be discussed.

During July 1914, Schweitzer sought medical aid for himself, and he travelled with Helene to Cape Lopez (in the delta of the Ogooué River; today the seaport of Port-Gentil). After treatment by the military doctor and on the way back to Lambaréné he wrote a short essay, 'Social problems of the forest' (Schweitzer 1956:82–99). It is from these pages that quotes are culled to indicate Schweitzer's colonialism, but the essay itself deserves closer scrutiny. It is, actually, a concise and acute analysis of the colonial situation and an honest examination of the causes of racial conflict.

Schweitzer points out, as a fundamental starting point, that Africans, at the beginning of their interaction with Westerners were the masters, not the servants, of their economy. And it is *because* they were free that their labour was casual, unpredictable from the 'white man's' point of view, as the white man was enslaved by the demands of productivity. So, in the colonial situation state and trade must unite to create need in the African to force the African into permanent work. The state will impose taxes and trade will 'seduce' the African with desirable objects (Schweitzer mentions safety razors, collars and ties, corsets, stockings, concertinas and music boxes, amongst others). Even more tragically, Schweitzer notes, Africans must be uprooted – they cannot be allowed to work near their villages –

in order to destroy their deep-rooted freedom. The African 'becomes a steady worker only so far as he ceases to be free and becomes unfree' (Schweitzer 1956):

The tragic element in this question is that the interests of civilisation and of colonisation do not coincide, but are largely antagonistic to each other ... Colonisation ... demands that as much of the population as possible shall be made available in every possible way for utilising to the utmost the natural wealth of the country. Its watchword is 'production', so that the capital invested in the colonies may pay its interest, and that the motherland may get her needs supplied through her connection with them. (p. 85, 87)

The context for Schweitzer's advice that Africans rather be left in their villages to train at their own pace and at *their* scale of things for various industries, is the battle for their freedom. This freedom should be built on industry and agriculture achieved *by themselves*, and will secure the economic conditions of *höhere Kultur* [high culture] (Schweitzer 1974c:428).²⁸ The reason for the poor relationship between Africans and Europeans is, in Schweitzer's analysis, their freedom from commitment to productivity (see also Schweitzer 2005b:371).

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28. In the context it seems that Schweitzer means universities, schools for advanced learning and training centres, but it is worthwhile to cite him for what culture and/or civilisation is generally speaking: 'The essential element in civilisation is the ethical perfecting of the individual as well as society. At the same time, every spiritual and every material step forward has significance for civilisation. The will to civilisation is, then, the universal will to progress that is conscious of the ethical as the highest value. In spite of the great importance we attach to the achievements of science and human prowess, it is obvious that only a humanity that is striving for ethical ends can benefit in full measure from material progress and can overcome the dangers that accompany it' (Schweitzer 1998:148).

Yes, Schweitzer is somewhat sympathetic to the European industrialists, and he clearly reveals an authoritarian personality,²⁹ but he does not hesitate to call the efforts at enforced industrialisation a 'kind of slavery' (Schweitzer 1956:88).

To deal with this conflict and the ethical and epistemological (world view) problems generating the conflict (i.e. the battle for values, and whose decisions and preferences should prevail), Schweitzer proposes his reverence for life philosophy. It is not just an ethical model, but a comprehensive 'new rationalism' with which to do politics and constitute society. Schweitzer did not expect much of decolonisation if independence was not preceded by ethics education: he quickly perceived the danger that in the new states, power would be forfeited to the benefit of a well-connected group whose sole purpose would be to get rich.

In a detailed study of Schweitzer's politics, Thomas Suermann (2012) contrasts the *homo politicus* with the *homo economicus*, the one only interested in his or her own welfare. Clearly, Suermann indicates, Schweitzer's ethic of 'reverence for life' puts him dramatically opposite the *homo economicus* and, in that sense, Schweitzer is truly a political person. However, Schweitzer radically individualises political issues. It is as individuals with a

29. Brabazon (2000:253–259) suggests that, rather than paternalism, Schweitzer carried an authoritarian attitude.

truer ethic that a society will become more just (cf. Oermann 2009:162–163, Schweitzer 1959).

The collapse of civilisation [*Kultur*] has come about through ethics being left to society. A renewal of it is possible only if ethics become once more the concern of thinking human beings, and if individuals seek to assert themselves in society as ethical personalities. (p. 328)

Schweitzer invokes Goethe to remind us that society changes with the times, but humans will always be human. Thus, one must strive to be better, as one living an inner life, but also as one becoming a person of action, in a way corresponding to one's own nature (Schweitzer 1949:48–49). The goal of ethics, in Schweitzer's thinking, is fundamentally about the realisation (or perfecting) of humanity's nature as an individual; strikingly he compares the ethics of the individual to a string quartet whilst the ethics of society is 'military music' (Schweitzer 1981:234).

He was deeply suspicious of mass-action; Schweitzer approved Goethe's judgement that 'revolutionary activity was mass-will trying to subject individual wills to itself' (Schweitzer 1949:51). Goethe experienced the dark side of the Revolution, and Schweitzer is convinced that we should take certain lessons to heart (Schweitzer 1949):

In thousandfold ways man has let himself be led to renounce his natural relationship to reality and to seek his weal [*ihr Heil*] in the magic formulas of some economic or social system which only thrusts still further the possibility of escape from economic and social misery! And the terrible significance of these magic formulas, to whatever school of economic and social witchcraft they may belong, is always that the

individual has to surrender his material and spiritual personal existence, and may continue to live only as belonging body and soul to a plurality which controls him absolutely. (p. 50)

Schweitzer is convinced that personal and societal development and growth (and even international peace) can only emerge from moral and spiritual change. Governments, profit-driven institutions or activist organisations can only achieve temporary or illusionary results if the individuals involved have not made a serious ethical commitment. Such an inner change follows from reverence for life as a world view, and involves accepting responsibility for justice, compassion, love of peace and non-violence. The change will only be real if concrete acts of support and service are performed. This inner change, with its interconnected complexities, is the content of Schweitzer's ethical mysticism.

Such a change should be embedded in practical realities – that is why Schweitzer emphasises *ethical* mysticism. Reasonable persons might disagree about how best to make decisions regarding difficult issues, but Schweitzer argues (and shows with his own life) that reverence for life calls on each of us to engage in moral reasoning, authentically and responsibly, whilst respecting others who do likewise, to find ways with which life can be affirmed. 'Only through reverence for life can we attain the standards of economic justice, about which we have to come to an understanding with each other' (Schweitzer 1959:337).

Schweitzer developed an innovative, moral perspective centred on self-realization, life-centred (or even nature-centred) spirituality and ethical pragmatism. He responds to our current cultures of violence and alienation by arguing that ethics must be a deeply personal response to the need for meaning and self-fulfilment. He makes ideals of character fundamental whilst celebrating individualism and wide tolerance in applying those ideals and affirming the sacredness of life in its diversity and unity.

Returning to the accusation of Schweitzer as a colonialist, it is clear that reverence for life does not lead to an ‘illusion of benevolence’. In the detail and application of Schweitzer’s ethics, he provides a means to transcend social distance and truly avoid any hypocrisy when championing non-discrimination. Reverence for life is an empowering ideal, transforming how we live in that it necessitates service to others.

■ Conclusion

Reverence for life provides no direct solution (or ‘guide’) to the struggle for African decolonisation and enhanced independence (cf. Schweitzer 1992:287), but it is certainly relevant to that struggle. Schweitzer considered reverence for life a foundation for all dimensions of ethics, a foundation that allows individual freedom of conscience in making personal decisions and establishing social policies and law. Although Schweitzer

believed that social transformation had to begin with spiritual change within individuals, he was convinced of the transformative power of this philosophy (Schweitzer 1959):

The ethics of reverence for life put in our hands weapons for fighting false ethics and false ideals, but we have strength to use them only so far as we – each one in one's own life – preserve our humanity. Only when those ... are numerous who in thought and in action bring humanity to terms with reality, will humanity cease to be current as a mere sentimental idea and become what it ought to be, a leaven in the minds of individuals and in the spirit of society. (p. 329)

Schweitzer felt one 'must give something in return' for one's good fortune (Schweitzer 1998:82). In Schweitzer's philosophy 'good fortune' means being well-off compared to disadvantaged individuals (Schweitzer 1965a:40), and the 'must' indicates that giving is a moral requirement rather than an optional good. Acting on the good fortune principle helps restore justice through individual initiatives to promote equality.

Schweitzer does highlight a role for justice in generating the obligation to help, but he has in mind compensatory rather than distributive justice. Compensatory justice requires making reparations for past and present wrongdoing. In particular, Europeans should 'atone' for their collective guilt for atrocities against Africans in slave trading, thefts of land and exploitation of resources, and the spread of disease and alcoholism whilst withholding essential medical care (Schweitzer 1974b:55). More than the fair allocation of resources, real (compensatory) justice

concerns making amends for causing harm (Schweitzer 1956:123–125).

Schweitzer presents reverence for life as a comprehensive moral ideal, even when he concedes that it primarily concerns personal ethics and spiritual matters rather than social ethics. That should not prevent us, however, from appreciating the relevance of what he says about gratitude and serial reciprocity, about reverence for life entailing compassion, love of peace and non-violence. In Schweitzer's time the problem with colonialism was injustice, and today injustices are still rampant. Our times are heavily dominated by a discourse concerning 'rights' (and rightly so), but our appreciation of rights needs to be enlivened by caring relationships, by a sense of gratitude (for life which can aid life) and by a deep commitment to ethical achievement: by reverence for life.

■ Chapter 2: Summary

The work of Albert Schweitzer contains various contributions to the post-colonial debate. He analyses the problems of colonialism and his theory of ethics provides a basis for dealing with the consequences of colonialism. Schweitzer grounds his philosophy of reverence for life on ethical mysticism and it encompasses compassion, love of peace and non-violence as elements. There are many comments, insights and critical remarks concerning politics, colonialism and development in

Africa to be found in his work. Schweitzer wants to think about the issues of exploitation, oppression and government as primarily the individual's challenge, and how society and politics can be transformed so that life can be fully respected and facilitated to thrive. Reverence for life should be the individual's foundation in choosing political systems or preferences for government styles.

Colonisation as an obstacle to Civilisation: a critical evaluation of Albert Schweitzer's Experiences and Observations

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■ Introduction

From his writings, Albert Schweitzer constantly reveals the incompatibility between colonisation and civilisation. The African colonies which were already working towards civilisation were

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crippled by the impact brought by colonisation. The colonial worldview and its influence on Africa hampered the civilisation which was already taking place. Schweitzer possessed vast academic experience from which he tapped his scholarly and philosophical observations. Critics have not spared him for being a racist and colonialist, as may be depicted from some of his linguistic expressions in his description of, and attitude towards, Africans.

■ Colonisation

According to Oweriebor (2014) colonisation is defined within the confines of ‘European imperialist aggression, diplomatic pressures, military invasions, and eventual conquest’. The Europeans were only interested in satisfying their economic, political and social needs. Oweriebor (2014) further notes that ‘the colonial state was the machinery of administrative domination established to facilitate effective control and exploitation of the colonised societies’. Such observations reveal that the goal of colonisation was not to make any positive contributions to the African states.

Assimeng in Musendekwa (2011:43) reveals the impact of colonisation on indigenous society. Colonisation brought changes which resulted in the marginalisation of the indigenous people. Their fertile tribal land was taken over by the white minority elites.³⁰

30. The situation of Zimbabwe can give a good example. Creighton (1972:302–303) refers to the ‘Land Tenure Act’ that subdivided the country between the indigenous people and British colonialists. 44 952 900 acres of land were allocated to the 250 000 members of the European population and 44 944 500 acres were reserved for the approximately 5 million Africans.

Colonisation is depicted as the imposition of rule by foreign people over the indigenous peoples in order to extract materials from their countries. Schweitzer observes that colonisation entangled both indigenous Africans and white colonialists. The indigenous people who were exposed to white education did not become prosperous. Rather, through colonisation they lost their freedom. In the same way this was detrimental to their 'economic and social relations'. The weapons and money which were placed at their disposal by commerce turned the indigenous people into servitude by simply facilitating export, which made few people rich. As early as the days of slave trade people became the merchandise. They were bought in exchange for gunpowder, money, lead, tobacco and brandy (Schweitzer 1935:222).

The seizure of the land through violence and cruelty exposed the independent states to neo-colonialism.³¹ The new independent states proceeded to enslave the indigenous people. Self-government for the indigenous people in Liberia, for example, deteriorated because of their exportation of slaves to other countries (Schweitzer 1935:223). The French colonialists claimed to be on a mission of civilising the benighted indigenous Africans by lifting them from backwardness to the status of

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 31. Mutumbuka (1981:xiii) regards neo-colonialism as 'the transition from colonialism in the third world countries'; as 'the temptation and pitfall', which involves 'entry of colonialism in a new guise – in the guise of neo-colonialism'; 'sad truth that African countries are often worse off after independence because of the cruel and ruthless exploitation of neo-colonialism. Corruption and self-enrichment replace the search for freedom and truth; the masses continue to suffer as before'.

‘civilised French Africans’. In this way, the French followed the policy of French assimilation (Iweriebor 2014). Schweitzer disputes the justification of colonisation by colonial governments.

■ Trade and Commerce

Schweitzer exclaims that, ‘[t]he tragic fact is that the interests of colonisation and those of civilisation do not always run parallel, but are often in direct opposition to one another’. The indigenous people could have developed from semi-nomads to agriculturalists and specialists of, for example, carpentry and construction. This became impossible because they were exposed to financial business through the exporting of locally manufactured goods in exchange for imported goods (Schweitzer 1935:223). Thus, there was no development from colonisation into a true civilisation. Whilst the sustainable wealth should have consisted of agriculture and handicrafts, it was instead based on money which in turn enabled the indigenous people to buy manufactured goods and food. This development was detrimental to local agricultural production (Schweitzer 1935:224). The proceeds from their labour were used to buy imported foodstuffs such as rice, preserved food, cotton, minerals, etc.

Railways and roads offered little development for the indigenous people, other than fulfilling the interests of the colonialists. Even when they facilitated the transportation of

food to places where there was starvation, it was to the benefit of the colonialists. More so, they required more labourers than were available. Such building construction was commonly associated with the loss of lives (Schweitzer 1935:224).

The indigenous people were, and still are, dying because of alcohol consumption that was fed by commerce. Forbidding rum and brandy, yet allowing wine and beer did no good either. The tropical temperatures further fermented wine to pure alcohol (Schweitzer 1935:226). The worst scenario was the increase in the consumption of wine to make up for the absence of rum and brandy. There was a need for the banning of the importation of alcohol of any kind because it was contrary to true civilisation.

In Schweitzer's time, civilisation was based on material benefits for the colonies and not for the indigenous people, an idea which was taken over by the participants of the liberation struggle in African countries. This proves that he was a source of inspiration for the indigenous people to engage in fight for independence. Having noted that neither trade nor commerce had any meaningful contribution to civilisation, let us look at what could have been true civilisation for Africa without colonial interests.

■ True civilisation

Schweitzer (1948:79) proposes that the interests of real civilisation and those of colonisation do not coincide, but are

substantially antagonistic to each other. From this observation, it is notable that the interests of colonisation are detrimental to real and progressive civilisation. This notion can be further developed by noting that the indigenous people were already pursuing civilisation, which was interrupted by colonial involvement. To Schweitzer (1949), colonisation is a product of self-interest whilst civilisation emanates from his philosophy of 'reverence for life'. 'Reverence for life' summarised what Schweitzer believed should be the elementary and universal principle of ethics (Carter 2002). Schweitzer's definition sounds more African than European.

In this regard, Schweitzer precisely defines civilisation as an aim to promote the wellness of indigenous people within their 'social structures'. In his purpose for education, he considers it as promoting industrialisation and agriculture that promote the livelihood of the indigenous people. Civilisation should therefore have aimed at empowering indigenous people in securing good sanitation and accommodation. On the other hand, civilisation could have focused on the utilisation of available human resources, wherever possible, for local development. The colonialists grabbed as many resources as they could without any serious consideration of the welfare of the indigenous people. All the accrued wealth from the colonies was shipped to their motherland. It is critical to understand that there was no serious concern or interest for the indigenous people's livelihood. In Schweitzer's philosophy of 'reverence for life' can be traced a selfless

commitment to serving those in need (Markel 2016) and developing brotherhood with those in need (Renate 2005).

The idea of ‘reverence for life’ is traceable even in Schweitzer’s youth when he refused to dress differently from other village boys who were poor. He also refused to put on an overcoat and shoes different from his school mates and did not want to look better than them. Schweitzer’s experiences in his youth inspired his understanding that civilisation is selfless. This exposes colonialism, which is based on self-interest and bears no mark of civilisation at all (Renate 2005).

In reference to Schweitzer, Angelo (2012) claims the essential element in civilisation to be the ethical perfecting of the individual and society. The will to civilisation is, hence, the ‘universal will to progress that is conscious of the ethical as the highest value’.

In consideration, his literary and metaphoric³² use of his experience would best be explained by the incompatibility between colonisation and civilisation. Schweitzer (1949) says:

Year after year since then work has been carried on with the object of producing a Garden of Eden round the hospital. Hundreds of young fruit trees, which we have grown from pips, have already been planted. Some day there must be so much fruit growing here that all may take

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32. Schweitzer (1949:173) referred to trees metaphorically. He says: ‘Just as a tree bears year after year the same fruit and yet fruit which is each year new, and so must all permanently valuable ideas be continually born again in thought. But our age is bent on trying to make the barren tree of skepticism fruitful by tying fruits of truth on its branches’. This form of expression stimulates an understanding that even his narratives cannot be taken entirely at face value.

what they please, and there will no longer be such a thing like crime.
(p. 162)

Such literal observation can translate well in the light of civilisation, the main purpose of which is to provide a beneficial environment for the indigenous people: i.e. an environment that is characterised by plenty and prosperity such that none can be exposed to the sin of theft. The supplies should be adequate for all, including hospital patients and the marginal societies.

Schweitzer (1949) further says:

We have already got to the stage with the fruits of the papaya, the mango trees and the palm oil. The papaya we have planted in such numbers are already producing more fruit than the hospital needs, while of mango trees and oil palms there were so many already growing in the forest around that when cut out they had formed regular groves. As soon as ever they were delivered from the cripplers which [were] strangling them, and from giant trees that overshadowed, they at once began to bear. (p. 162)

The cripplers and huge trees illustrate the prohibitive force of colonialism. Colonisation, therefore, can be best described as the crippling power that deprives the natives of civilisation. This crippling power of colonisation becomes the obstacle for the natives to continue with uninterrupted civilisation. No fruit of civilisation can be realised in the presence of the crippling powers and shadowy colonialism. Colonisation has strangled the fruitful natives from the civilisation that was supported by mission work. Colonialism becomes as prohibitive as the crippling trees, as we learn from Schweitzer's observations during his mission work in Africa as a medical doctor.

Having looked at true civilisation, it is necessary to take note of some of the negative influences of colonisation on the African indigenous people. Some of the evils have already been highlighted in contrast to true civilisation. The term ‘negative’ here would relate to how Africans were compelled to behave in ways detrimental to good morality.

■ **The negative influence of colonisation on African indigenous people**

African indigenous people have been portrayed as dishonest. This could be because their living and working conditions compelled them to steal. Indigenous people followed a legal system that was consistent with good morality when dealing with issues of theft; hence, dishonesty could not be found. However, they were often incited to be dishonest and precautionary measures were constituted. Because of the living and working conditions, they stole from the colonial employer. For them, stealing from a European was not a taboo. Africans have good conscience when stealing from the white employer. Treatment at work and the resultant unfavourable remuneration caused them to steal even the working time. Schweitzer also experienced that Africans who were not under strict supervision did not work. Negative treatment of indigenous people incites behaviour that is not in line with good morality (Schweitzer 1948: 88).

Schweitzer also notes that the use of authority invited negative responses and resistance. The situation worsens when the product is not beneficial to the indigenous people. He says: '[m]aintenance of such authority of a white man over a black man was agreed among colonialists and missionaries' (Schweitzer 1948:88). Schweitzer did not have a strong opinion on how Africans should be treated at work. Indigenous people were exposed to forced labour at mission stations and in concessions. The attitude of colonialists towards indigenous people was based on their self-interest to acquire wealth for their mother countries and not for local civilisation.

Earlier Schweitzer (1948:75–77) stated that the compulsion to work resulted in creating essential needs such as clothes, tools and other unnecessary needs. Tobacco and alcohol were counted amongst unnecessary wants that stimulated the desire for money and enjoyment rather than stimulating indigenous people to work. Such treatment would never generate conditions for civilisation; instead it had the effect of uncivilising people.

Indigenous people were hard workers but could not work for more money when they had no need of it. The colonialists introduced a poll tax to create in them more needs. At the same time, traders created voluntary needs by offering them wares. They were induced to work more than they could as they became more anxious for money (Schweitzer 1948:76–77). As though that was not enough, the forest owners hired labour

from other colonies. These labourers had to remain at their work location but were released after a year with half their wages withheld until the end of the year. In this regard, Schweitzer notes that the interests of colonisation and civilisation do not coincide but are rather in opposition. Hence colonisation and civilisation are incompatible.³³

Would forced labour and the establishment of concessions have anything to do with the genuine intentions to civilise? Forced labour has adverse repercussions even today when the African indigenous people leave their families in rural areas to be employed in urban areas. They are only able to meet their families in rare circumstances.

The establishment of concessions caused the indigenous people to become dependent on the owning company. Compulsory labour³⁴ became predominant and resulted in a secret kind of slavery. Schweitzer noted how villagers were abused when they were paid in spirits and tobacco rather than cash. This exposed the indigenous people to health hazards (Schweitzer 1948:16–17). For Schweitzer, alcoholism is the

33. Schweitzer (1948:79) eludes that some differences were noted in Zululand where natives naturally developed into peasantry, cattle raising and home-industrialists.

34. To single out the equivalent atrocities of colonisation, Gondongwe (2010:41) notes that compulsory forced labour was one of the evils of colonialism which was used during colonial Zimbabwe as a product of the Land Apportionment Act, which divided the country with the indigenous people being given unproductive weak soils whilst the Europeans enjoyed the fertile soils. The indigenous people were then forced to labour on the European farms.

greatest enemy of civilisation. Africans were eventually exposed to diabetes, insomnia and toothache, which were rare amongst indigenous people. Earlier, the use of alcohol amongst indigenous people was limited to traditional festivals (Schweitzer 1948:84) and was accompanied by a brew from the pine tree that was less hazardous when taken in small quantities at rare intervals. The preparation of palm wine was rare because it was even forbidden amongst them.

In this regard, Schweitzer dismisses as 'mere talk' the fact that alcoholism would continue even in the absence of cheap rum and brandy. With reference to the importation of spirits, a trader reiterated to Schweitzer that strong drink brings diseases which were unknown to the African. The blessings colonisation bring to Africans are really outweighed by the evils that go with them (Schweitzer 1948:12). However, any blessings as such would never be a source of admiration for a once-oppressed African indigenous person. Considerations of the positive influence of colonisation would outweigh the significance of the liberation struggle for indigenous people.

Some of the miseries of colonisation have continued to the present generation. Colonisation brought diseases from Europe which caused more misery amongst indigenous people than amongst Europeans (Schweitzer 1948:114).

Colonisation intoxicated the indigenous people and reduced them to abject poverty, whilst the colonialists became wealthy

and enriched their motherlands. Even today, many African states are under-developed. The westernisation of Africa did not contribute to any form of civilisation. How then, could anyone ever justify that the goal was the bringing of civilisation, in whatever form? Civilisation should have taken its own course in Africa without external intervention.

Schweitzer (1948:84) says that the missionaries and the colonial government agreed on the banning of the importation of spirits, but this could not take place because it would impact on the economy: the cheap spirits attracted high import duty. Such failures resulted in the failure of the indigenous people to distinguish between missionaries and colonialists.

Schweitzer (1948:84) observes that nicotine poisoning caused constipation, nervous disturbances and loosening teeth because of tartar. Investigations and observations reveal that these diseases were caused by smoking. If such imported substances had adverse effects on African indigenous people, how much more would be the impact of the colonial presence? Africa should have defined its own civilisation and freed itself from domination by the minority intruders.

The colonial government and the missionaries abolished polygamy without recognising the social effects on the natives and, what is more, forgetting that it was rooted in the existing economic conditions. Circumstances which permitted marital inheritance were suppressed, even by law, without

acknowledging the benefit it brought. Schweitzer considered marital inheritance to be beneficial because no one was left entirely widowed or orphaned as one of the family members would always inherit them. It could not be possible to single out certain aspects of the society without being detrimental to the rest of the social structure. He notes that, once the social structure is permeated by civilisation, it diminishes because it is no longer compatible with new living conditions. Christian teaching is sufficient without enforcing abolition by order.

The impact of colonisation itself worsens the miserable conditions of indigenous people because it is coupled with injustice and cruelty which was previously unknown. He notes the insurmountable misery produced by the fiery drinks and the hideous diseases that had been supplied to them (Schweitzer 1948:115). He alludes to horrible stories from the earlier days of European occupation to his present time. The colonial governments were truly indebted to the indigenous people that no acts of benevolence atoned for the evils of colonisation. The debt is so great that even when the acts of benevolence are mathematically calculated, 'it is 1/1000 of their guilt'. Schweitzer's mission to Africa was therefore making a small recompense for the evils which were associated with colonisation (Learning-Living, 2016).

If the magnitude of evil can be observed by a fellow European, how much more could that be notable amongst the indigenous

people? This definitely stimulates resistance. Although Africa is now independent, some such oppressive structures are continually being demolished, such as in Zimbabwe where land redistribution, which contributed to the fall of the Zimbabwean economy, ensures that the once oppressor cannot continue capitalising on the indigenous people.

World Heritage Encyclopaedia (2014) quotes Schweitzer as saying that mission work entails making atonement for the crimes which were reported in the newspapers, including the bad crimes which were not recorded but were hidden in the jungle world. To him, mission work means seeking to atone for the evils that emanated from colonisation. From this perspective, one may not hesitate to claim that Schweitzer was a missionary for Africa.

Schweitzer refers to one of his lectures on *The Decay of Civilisation*. What could have been the cause of decay? How then, can this decaying civilisation be resurrected? (Schweitzer 1948:122). He then describes Ogowe region as being in a terrible state, which can be the sign of moral decay. He says: '[h]ow poor the territory is ... it is poor because it is so rich in timber'. He notes this because he is scornful of, and ashamed for, the magnitude of exploitation that enriched Europe and impoverished the African natives. Worse still, this was done to compromise agricultural production. Even home-grown timber could not benefit them in any way (Schweitzer 1948:123–124).

Even the timber which was available could not be utilised for the welfare of the natives. No food aid programme can atone for the evils of western colonialism. Even the imported rice from Europe could not benefit many inland dwellers. (Schweitzer 1948:179). To Schweitzer, civilisation begins not with reading and writing but with manual labour. Indigenous people should first be apprenticed to a trade of some sort. It was ridiculous for Schweitzer to learn that civilisation in Africa is confirmed by the construction of railways or roads which are not beneficial to the natives. Railways and roads only have meaning to natives when they are in industry.

War was also one of the negative effects of colonisation. Skillings (1935:190) expresses the oppressive nature of colonisation as a thousandfold violent and murderous in as much as it brutalised humanity. In a thousand different ways, humanity lost reality of life persuaded into 'economic and social witchcraft'. In this way, individuals succumbed to manipulation by the 'materialistic multitude' which controlled their 'spiritual and social personalities'. Dr Schweitzer, in Skillings (1935), alludes to the puzzle of war. He says:

We are all of us conscious that many of the natives are puzzling over the questions raised by the war. How can it be possible that the whites, who brought them the Gospel of Love, are now murdering each other, throwing to the wind the Gospel of the Lord Jesus? When they put the question to us we are helpless. If I am questioned on the subject by those who think, I make no attempt to explain or to extenuate, but say

that we are in Front of something terrible and incomprehensible. How far the authority of the white man among these children of nature is impaired by this war; we shall only be able to measure later on. I fear that the damage done will be very considerable. (n.p.)

Schweitzer (1948:96–98) compared the aggressive growth of the African forest with the militancy of European occupation. He firstly alluded to termites which, when they infested a chest of drawers, damaged drugs and bandages. They managed to find a way into the chest of drawers unnoticed. The peculiarity of the smell in the room begged him to find out the reason, and he realised that they had made an opening in the floor from where they attacked the chest. They even managed to gain entrance into the next chest when they were attracted by the medicine bottles whose corks had been loosened. This symbolises the colonial powers that gained entry into Africa and whose intentions were not clearly noticed. By the time that they were noticed substantial damage had been made. No independence in Africa has ever been able to secure the desired peace and stability.

The second comparison is with the fight with the creeping insects such as weevils which, even after thorough precautions, one would always find out that one has been outwitted. Although his wife sealed the flour and maize in tins, it was reduced to dust. Such events resembled the European penetration into the African environment and reduced the ongoing civilisation to chaff.

He further alludes to the traveller ants which have a more organised marching order 'with three or four columns marching abreast of each other'. The 'worriers' with a couple of rows each side to protect the ordinary traveller ants. He observed how they could gain entry into a chicken-house and, if not attended to, the chickens would be suffocated by the ants which crept into their nostrils and mouths before all of the flesh was stripped and only bones remained. The warrior ants continued to attack even when they were sprayed with Lysol. They would bite so severely that, when trying to remove them, the jaws would remain stuck in the flesh. This comparison alludes to the European occupation, which resulted in the Africans suffering an indelible mark in their future lives.

The face of Africa had completely changed. Sand fleas and *Sangunagenta* (one of the worst species of ants) were imported in wooden crates from South America (1948:58). These insect pests can also represent the symbolic infiltration of colonial rule on African land. They eventually became uncontrollable species. The only way to get rid of them is to wage war on them.

World Heritage Encyclopaedia (2014) notes Schweitzer's observation that there were injustices and cruelty which the Africans had suffered over centuries at the hands of the Europeans. Schweitzer is noted as declaring that, even if the

atrocities waged by the Europeans against the Africans are recorded, the book would be quite voluminous and yet unreadable because of the horrible contents.³⁵ In this regard, the World Heritage Encyclopaedia supports the idea that Schweitzer was the harshest critique of colonisation during his time. In order to substantiate this point it picks a portion of Schweitzer's sermon of 1905 that reads:

I will not enumerate all the crimes that have been committed under the pretext of justice. People robbed native inhabitants of their land, made slaves of them; let loose the scum of mankind upon them. Think of the atrocities that were perpetrated upon people made subservient to us, how systematically we have ruined them with our alcoholic 'gifts', and everything else we have done ... We decimate them, and then, by the stroke of a pen, we take their land so they have nothing left at all (n.p.)

In most of Schweitzer's observations and experiences one may find it difficult to evaluate his real positioning. From the most general outlook, he was not in favour of colonisation. However, in analysing his attitude one may find that he was, to a certain extent, following the trends of colonisation in his operations. Differences in skin colour identified him more with his compatriots from Europe than with Africans. His advocacy for reverence for life was not sufficient to be truly representative of Africans. Africans only needed African representation in a world which is free from intruders. In this regard, it is worth to explore criticism on Schweitzer's attitude towards Africans.

35. http://self.gutenberg.org/articles/Albert_Schweitzer.

■ Attitude towards Africans

Schweitzer was sometimes accused of being colonialist, paternalistic and racist in his attitude towards Africans. Sometimes he does not align with views of staunch critics of colonialism. One of the greatest criticisms against him concerns his understanding of Gabonese independence. He claimed that Gabon was given independence prematurely since they had no adequate education and decent accommodation (World Heritage Encyclopaedia).

An excerpt from Schweitzer's 'African Notebook' (2008) reveals that Schweitzer had a negative attitude towards Africans:

There is something that all white men who have lived here like I must learn and know: that these individuals are a sub-race. They have neither the intellectual, mental, or emotional abilities to equate or to share equally with white men in any function of our civilization. I have given my life to try to bring them the advantages which our civilization must offer, but I have become well aware that we must retain this status: the superior and they the inferior. For whenever a white man seeks to live among them as their equals they will either destroy him or devour him. And they will destroy all of his work. Let white men from anywhere in the world, who would come to Africa, remember that you must continually retain this status; you the master and they the inferior like children that you would help or teach. Never fraternize with them as equals. Never accept them as your social equals or they will devour you. They will destroy you. (n.p.)

Defenders of Schweitzer do not leave any negative critic unchallenged. Angelo (2012 online) implores that Schweitzer's

commitment to Africa resulted in his self-giving to serve in Africa for 50 years in a self-established hospital. Being a European scholar and musician, he might have found it hard to dedicate such time in a forest hospital in the equatorial Africa. Angelo also wonders whether the people of the post-colonial era can have the potential to develop the true understanding of a man who was born in 1875. His understanding of the world could have been so different from our time.

Angelo (2012) defends Albert Schweitzer, a European scholar and musician, for his personal commitment to serve 50 years of his life as a medical doctor. He then blames the era of the present interpreters as detrimental to clear appreciation of Schweitzer. Schweitzer, in Angelo (2012), has this to say:

The Negro is a Child, and with children nothing can be done without use of authority. We must, therefore so arrange the circumstances of daily life that my natural authority can find expression. With regard to the Negroes I have coined the formula, 'I am your brother, it is true, but your elder brother'. (n.p.)

His fellow white missionaries recognised that the African indigenous people must be treated with authority. Angelo is aware of the somewhat racist attitude revealed in the above quotation. For Angelo, this is questionably racist from the perspective that it was made in the French colony of Gabon of 1913 at a place and time unknown to him. He relied on the testimonies of those who lived in the land during that time. The question which can arise is how reliable would those sources be

since they were equally influenced by colonisation? Angelo is determined to understand whether Schweitzer was a racist because Schweitzer considered that Africans are children. He imagines that this could have been the condition of that time. Markel (2006) supports this idea by considering that, although this cannot be tolerated today, this was common during his era, which was influenced by colonialism, racism and paternalism.

Neuenschwander in Schweitzer (1968) claims that the way Schweitzer describes African customs, habits at work and social structure sounds uncomfortable to modern readers. Though Neuenschwander tries to defend him by arguing that these were the early days when Europeans and Africans were beginning to interact, Schweitzer had already sounded as if three hundred years of colonisation had already elapsed.

Chinua Achebe has been quoted in the World Heritage Encyclopaedia as criticising Schweitzer for his claim to be his junior brother. He criticised him despite the fact that Achebe is seemingly acknowledging Schweitzer's use of the word 'young brother', for he used it within the terms known to the 20th century reader. He was actually aware of this because he eventually indicated that the time of being younger brother had elapsed.

Angelo also considers the use of words like 'black' or 'Negro' and 'white' instead of 'African' and 'European' renders the colonialists racists. Angelo defends Schweitzer for writing 'my

natural authority' and 'elder brother', and for speaking of himself as 'a representative of civilization among a primitive (or pre-historic) people'. However, it is not justifiable to consider Africans as primitive. Africa was already in a more civilised state than that imposed by the European civilisation on African people. Angelo's paraphrase of Schweitzer is as follows:

When before coming to Africa, I heard missionaries and traders say again and again that one must be very careful out here to maintain this authoritative position of the Whiteman, it seemed to me to be a hard and unnatural position to take up. As it does to everyone in Europe who reads or hears the same. [*If we abandoned the social interval between black and white, we would lose all influence, our word would no longer be taken as a white man's word, but would argue in every point with Africans as if we were merely equals.*] (n.p., [translation])

The New York Times (2011) refers to Schweitzer as possessing a feeling of being at home in Africa. In most cases, Schweitzer regarded most Africans as primitive children. Schweitzer is further referred to as someone who communicated with Africans as children. He is reported to have said that God had protected the trees from Africans, who are lazy and not able to pick all the fruit.

Despite many criticisms, Schweitzer's own life served as a living testimony for some who encountered him. His zeal for the well-being of African indigenous people was demonstrated also in his career as a medical doctor who strived to see their recovery of health. Although he was not in a position to stop that which caused some of the diseases, such as alcohol and tobacco

(which continue to be consumed even to this day), he refrained from testing new medicines in Africa. Rather, as one of the testimonies about him reflects, he preferred medicine to be tested for the first time on himself before being tested on other people. Dr Ernest Bueding in *Skilling* (1949:195) relates the interesting story of the vaccine which was prepared and to be tested. Someone requested for the vaccine to be tested in Africa, but Schweitzer declined because a large scale test could only be considered if he could be given that test to 'experience and evaluate the untoward results'. He considered that once the vaccine is safe for him, it could equally be safe for Africans. After his superior failed to convince him otherwise, the vaccine was tried on him, and he was hospitalised for two days as a precautionary measure. After all of this he wondered why he could be kept idle for the two days.

However, the journalist James Cameron is referred to in the online document (Reuters 1965) as having visited Schweitzer in 1953 and found significant shortcomings in his and his staff's attitude towards Africans. The dominant shortcoming was his little contact with the indigenous African people. The same website also includes the report of John Gunther, who reported on Schweitzer's attitude of patronising Africans to the extent that he did not train Africans as nurses. He only depended on nurses who came from Europe.

Schweitzer (1949:132–133) observed that if someone does something he or she must do it out of 'love and care'. Shortly

after arrival back home of prisoners of war, another group of prisoners arrived and showed dissatisfaction with the way the food was being prepared by the professional cooks. The group comprised of tailors, hat makers shoemakers and brush makers. They had gained experience in cooking large quantities of food that taste as good as that cooked in small quantities. When they were tasked with the preparation of potatoes they proved better cooks than those professionals who were hotel trained. When the shoemaker was asked about the secret of their success he eluded that, apart from their experience one 'need[s] to cook with love and care'. This reveals that the experience of colonialists in dealing with African colonies could have caused even trained people to act carelessly because of their lack of love for the indigenous people, whilst the more loving and caring people in Africa who do tasks out of love were deported.

■ Conclusion

Although Schweitzer surpassed his contemporaries in speaking against colonization, he is also blamed for living to the colonial standards by not properly representing Africans when this was needed. In his condemnation of colonisation he managed to point out that colonisation is so detrimental to the development of Africa. African leaders who are bred under colonial conditions tend to manipulate the colonial leaders. This would be deterrent to total freedom and freedom to pursue civilisation as indigenous people.

Nothing can reverse the impact of colonisation amongst indigenous African people. The spiral goes on as the colonial baton is handed to indigenous people who potentially become oppressive forces because they were brought up under oppressive conditions.

Whilst Schweitzer spoke against his contemporary Europeans and was more or less a founder of post-colonial criticism, he always held himself superior to African indigenous people. Although he might have been genuine for the historic moment, he would not be counted as a contemporary by Africans. Albert Schweitzer's thought patterns of those distant days may not be similar to current thinking, however, despite his attitude towards colour divisions; they would compel a particular way of understanding him.

■ Chapter 3: Summary

Albert Schweitzer was a missionary medical doctor to Africa who established a Hospital at Lambarene in Gabon. Apart from his academic excellence, his experiences and observations reveal the tension between colonisation and civilisation. This research serves to reveal that colonialism and civilisation are incompatible. Schweitzer exposes the evils of colonisation which hinder the progression of civilisation. His definition of civilization is based on his philosophy of 'Reverence for Life' which seeks to consider the well-being of the other. He speaks against the colonial

governments that have no heart for the lives of the natives but promote their own interest. Although, in most cases, he sounds to be a post-colonial critic of European settlement in Africa, and he is not spared for being racist by some critics for treating elderly Africans as children. A critical evaluation of his experiences and observations reveals that Schweitzer was against colonialism. European activities in Africa were detrimental to the progression of civilisation in Africa.

Part 2

**Albert Schweitzer and reverence
for life**

Imago Dei: Albert Schweitzer's 'reverence for Life' in dialogue with African Humanism

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■ Introduction

This chapter brings three world views – the Biblical (*Imago Dei*), the western (Albert Schweitzer) and the African (humanism) into a critical dialogue in an attempt to highlight the commonness of concern for the preservation, promotion, protection and prosperity of human lives inherent in all of them. It critically examines and analyses some extant scholarly literature on the

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imago and *similitudo Dei* based on the Genesis creation or cultural mandate (Gn 1:26–28) in order to answer the question as to what constitutes the *imago Dei*, or 'divine nature', imparted to humans by their Maker. Moreover, it aligns this with African humanism with its respect for human lives in order to highlight the value of Albert Schweitzer's 'reverence for life' as a panacea for the socio-political vices, insurgency, terrorism, kidnappings and ritual murders, to name a few, that presently haunt various nations of the world, particularly Nigeria. In the following sections a discussion of the *imago* and *similitudo Dei* is followed by a résumé of Albert Schweitzer's views on the worth of the human person, and lastly by a perspective on 'humanism' associated with African scholars and societies with emphasis on the brotherhood of all humanity and on the need to save and spare the human person.

■ '*Imago Dei*'

In this chapter, the 'image of God' is seen as derived from a royal ideology of the ancient Near East and is here made popular by the cultural or creation mandate of Genesis 1:26–28 (Von Rad 1971:144–145). The *imago Dei* is seen as the person who is a representative of God on earth. Von Rad (1971:144–145) built his argument on that premise and stressed that there is something more than spiritual and intellectual in the image and similitude of God which humans portray, even in the splendour of their bodily forms. Von Rad made good use of analogy from the

ancient Near Eastern world in describing man as God's representative on earth, not in a teleological, but in an ontological sense, more to man's purpose on earth than to his being (Birch 1991:88). The Babylonian use of images to stand in place of the gods leads this school of thought to the conclusion that earthly rulers do indeed use their images in places where they otherwise could not be physically present. Von Rad is the leading proponent of this view. He has been followed by others such as E. Jacob and W.H. Schmidt, both of whom have confirmed this explanation and given it a new dimension by means of a number of Egyptian and Mesopotamian texts which speak of the king as the image of God.

The capacity for knowing good and evil as a further reflection of the *imago Dei*, or the image likeness of God, is ascribed to humans in Genesis 3:22. This ability to exercise judicial discernment is elsewhere noted as a God-like characteristic depicted in I Kings 3, verse 9 and 28 – a passage further indexing the prominent place of the official-judicial aspect of the Biblical concept of the image of God (Kline 1991:28–30). The image of God is closely aligned to the concept of sonship in Genesis 5:1ff, and in Genesis 9:6 is a clear identification of the image bearing and judicial authority inherent in human nature as the image of God and corroborated by his being authorised to inflict capital punishment upon murderers (Von Rad 1971:144–145). The evidence of the book of Genesis will suffice to illustrate the point, but a survey of all the Scriptural data would disclose that,

consistently, the image of God is identified in terms of a glory akin to that of God Himself (Boice 1986:149–150). Humans are thus 'rulers' of the earth under God. They possess the ethical glory of a state of simple righteousness, with the prospect of moving on to greater glory of confirmed righteousness. Humans were given the hope of an eschatological glorification that would change them into a transformed glory image of a radiant Glory-Spirit (Boice 1986:149–150).

Be that as it may, the creation or cultural mandate empowers humans made in the image of God to become responsible moral agents in God's universe. The creation of the first man shows this: the subduing of the earth, that is, the whole of culture, is given to him, and can be given to him only because he is created after God's image (Cassuto 1978:58). Humans can be rulers of the earth only because, and in so far as, they are servants, sons and daughters of God. It is doubtful, however, if humans have built on this foundation of sonship. Instead, humankind has taken a subservient role and not always followed a normal course as evidenced in the numerous wars, revolutions and catastrophes all over the world. There has always been a time of flourishing followed by a time of decay and ruin for humans – the so-called vicissitudes of life on earth!

■ **The *imago* and *similitudo Dei***

Scholars have also attempted to interpret the *similitudo Dei*, which is a component of the same cultural or creation mandate

(Gn1:26–28). Firstly, a distinction made between *imago* and *similitudo Dei* is based on the different names used in Genesis 1:26. Irenaeus was the first to point out that distinction, and since the 4th century the discussion has gone on in both the East and West right into the middle ages. Westermann (1984:149–152) summarises the views so far on the *imago* and *similitudo Dei* as follows: There are those who see the *imago* and *similitudo Dei* as pointing to a natural and supernatural likeness of humans to God. Others conceive of it as consisting of spiritual qualities or capacities. Still a third view is of an *imago* and *similitudo Dei* that points more to an external resemblance of humans to God. A fourth view insists that the whole person is made in the image of God, and that it is not the intention of the author to split one from the other. Again, a fifth view interprets the *imago* and *similitudo Dei* as embodiments of a human counterpart to God with whom God can be both in communion and conversation. Finally, a sixth view is that humans are the *imago* and *similitudo Dei* in the sense of a physical representation of God on earth (Blenkinsopp 1994:305ff). These views are further explained subsequently.

Firstly, it is generally agreed that the *imago* and *similitudo Dei* in the Genesis text is not speaking about a distinction between the natural and the supernatural. However, as Westermann (1984:149) has pointed out, this agreement might be true of Protestant and Reformed circles, but can hardly be said to be true of Catholic theology, which differentiates ‘the person’s natural likeness to God expressed in the Old Testament’ from ‘one’s

supernatural likeness to God expressed in the New Testament'. Thus, *imago* and *similitudo Dei* depicted in the Old Testament point to humans in their natural, physical abilities, whereas the same concept of *similitudo* (Gk. *eikón*) in the New Testament depicts humans transformed into supernatural, spiritual beings with Jesus Christ our Lord as the Prototype!³⁶ Such distinctions do not reflect for instance Paul's theology (2 Cor 4:4; Col 3:10) in which Jesus of Nazareth – perfect God perfect human – is pre-eminently the image of God (Merrill 2003:444–445).

Secondly, there is another view which sees the *imago* and *similitudo Dei* as consisting of spiritual qualities or capacities in humans. This is the most common explanation of this concept down through the centuries, namely that the likeness consists in human intellect, will and emotions which correspond to the tri-Unitarian concept of God. On the other hand, there are those who consider the *imago* and *similitudo Dei* as consisting in the very nature of human beings in totality and in both concrete and corporeal terms. P. Bratsiotis and G. Söhngen are Westermann's examples of propagators of this view.³⁷

36. Such distinctions preoccupied the theology of the second to the 5th-century church in both Asia and North Africa: the so-called *homoiōsis* debate which, by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 C.E., was resolved that, in the Person of Christ both the natural and the supernatural are distinct yet contiguous, inter-dependent and in perfect harmony. See. E. Cairns 1995 *Christianity through the centuries*... p. 69.

37. See P.N. Bratsiotis 1951–2 'Genesis 1:26 in *der orthodoxen Theologie*' *EvTh.* 11, p. 289–297; and G. Söhngen 1963 'Die biblische Lehre von der Gottesebenbildlichkeit des Menschen', *Festgabe Erzbischof Jäger*, Pro Veritate, Bischof Stäln.

Thirdly, there are interpreters who find the *imago* [image] and *similitudo* [likeness] in human personality, human understanding, human will and its freedom, self-consciousness, intelligence and beauty. Those whose views are in alliance with this are A. Dillman (1897:3) who insists that *imago Dei* consists of the human's spiritual endowments which are expressed through the bodily form, although not identical with it. In this respect, Dillman's view is as holistic as the views of Theodorus Vriezen and Karl Barth. The latter again tilting their views in favour of a more spiritual characteristic of the *imago Dei*. Others, like W. Eichrodt and J. Junker (1949:3), do the same.

Fourthly, there is the view that all about the *imago* and *similitudo Dei* is essentially physical, even though there is an underlying inner and spiritual dimension to it. In Brueggemann's (2001:241ff) opinion, this image of God is further affirmed in the prohibition of fixed images by God in the Decalogue in favour of the human physical image. He stated that 'there is only one way in which God is imaged in the world and only one: humanness'. Humans are the only part of creation which discloses to us something about the reality, the beauty, the power and the richness of God. Humans not only reflect a divine glory, as Kline (1991:28 30; Boice 1986:149–150) and others have argued, but also own a body shaped with grace, nobility, majesty and perfect beauty with which humans are enabled to fulfill the God-given mandate to 'subdue' and 'dominate' the earth. Humans were to do this more as caregivers and partners rather than as devastators!

It is the key concept for grasping the biblical understanding of image of God as referring to a moral being. By this Adam, who was created in the image and likeness of God, (is) God's own special representative, not simply by designation (command) but by design (nature or constitution) – i.e. as a representative of God (Birch 1991:87). Von Rad (1971), whilst recognising the image as physical underlines the essential inseparable nature of both the physical and the spiritual in humans, as the loss of one will mean the 'death' of the other. In both Old and New Testament, physical and spiritual life deriving from faith in God and/or Jesus Christ are co-terminous (Ps 51:11–12; Pr 4:23; Ezk 36:25–28, 37:10; Jn 6:27, 6:63; 2 Cor 4:7; Js 2:26).

Fifthly, there are those who consider the *imago Dei* as the special nature of human existence by virtue of which the person can take a stand before God. Thus, the essence of the *imago* and *similitudo Dei* consists in the ability of humans to form or enter into relationships with their Maker with a sense of responsibility and accountability for every act of omission or commission encountered in the process of that relationship. As so aptly put by J.J. Stamm (1959:81–90)³⁸ 'a human being is regarded as God's counterpart, as the "you" who must listen to God, whom God questions and who must answer him'.

It is the considered opinion of the present author that all of these views are unanimous in supporting the fact that the

38. Cited in Westermann, C., 1984, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*, SPCK, London, pp. 150–151.

human person bears the imprint of the Divine Being – God, and so human lives must be placed above the reach of miscreants in three interrelated ways.

First of all, human lives must be considered sacred and a responsibility for all human governments to preserve, protect, promote and prosper through all conceivable natural and supernatural means and methods. It means that the post-colonial identity of every human person on the surface of the earth should be one of an integrated personality. The present state in which human lives are treated with disrespect and disregard as typified by the terrorist attacks, kidnapping, ritual murders, insurgency and *Boko Haram* is nothing short of schizophrenia.

Secondly, it means that the hybrid culture of most peoples of the developing societies whereby they combine primordial sentiments with civic-public goals and end up being neither here nor there is problematic. Nothing in the (Gn 1:26–28) text smacks of a hybrid personality; instead the text suggests personal and corporate integrity that respects every human being's right to life, to liberty and to the pursuit of happiness.

Thirdly, it means that the endemic culture of miming the values and ethos of the Western democratic processes hook, line and sinker by those aspiring to lead others in the developing world should be halted and erased from their thinking, acting and speaking (Bhabha 1994:2–6).

■ Humans and nature in partnership

On a more auspicious note, the *imago* and *similitudo Dei* in Genesis 1:26–28 has ancient Near Eastern history behind it. Apparently, this also has been brought into an intercontextual dialogue with the contemporary Nigerian problem of 'disdain for human lives' in the terrorist acts of *Boko Haram*, as well as of militants and insurgents. In fact, the pericope has intertextual and intercontextual links with Wisdom texts such as Psalm 8, as well as with African humanism, which places a higher premium on the preservation, protection, promotion and prosperity of human lives. This literally resonates with the cosmogonies of ancient Near East and with Albert Schweitzer's perspective on 'reverence for life'. In all three perspectives we notice an affirmation of human lives preserved in partnership with nature and with the entire created order in a proactive, sustainable and humane manner.

On the other hand, any hermeneutic which interprets Genesis 1:26–28 as placing profit above people or which portrays the exploitation of natural resources as transcending human environmental integrity and cleanliness is defective and in need of a rereading. In doing this, we have highlighted a text in which is contained God's decisive dealing with his creation (Brueggemann 1995:16), and one in which creation is embodied as a creaturely unity (Gn 1:31, 8:22) in both theological and

ethical ways. Moreover, as I have pointed out elsewhere (Ahiamadu 2010, esp. Ch. 2), scholars like David Clines, Claus Westermann, Gerhard von Rad, and Joseph Blenkinsopp have each underscored the tension imbedded in creation in the ‘troubled relation of creator/creation and God’s enduring resolve to have creation on its terms’. Others like Karl Barth have depicted a relational understanding both of the *imago Dei* and of a partnership of humans with God and with one another in the care and nurture of creation – a partnership which is captured by our postcolonial indices of transcendence and holism (Ahiamadu 2010:155ff; 2011:185; cf. Brueggemann 2002:28–36).

At present the *imago Dei* has been grossly misunderstood with respect to creation resulting from a humans-above-nature rather than a humans-in-partnership-with-nature mindset. This has had an unsavoury consequence for the oil-bearing communities of the Niger Delta,³⁹ but has also created an environment hazardous to human health and survival. It is interesting to note that only to the extent that multinational companies are held responsible for the negative or positive impact that their industrial and mechanical operations are having on their host communities by those who truly seek to be the true *imago Dei*, can such multinational companies

39. These Niger Delta communities include the Abuas, the Bisenis, the Edos, the Egbemas, the Egnis (Ogbas), the Ekpeyes, the Engennis, the Etches, the Ikwerres, the Itshekiris, the Izens (Ijaws), the Kalabaris, the Ndokis, the Ndonis, the Nembes, the Ogbas (Igburus), the Okirikas, the Ogonis, the Sagbamas and the Urhobos, to name a few.

consider themselves accountable for the impacts which they create in oil-bearing communities (cf. Geisler 1995:309). The experience of Nigeria shows that such a sense of responsibility is lacking both on the part of government in not enacting and enforcing the implementation of environmental laws, and on the part of multinational companies⁴⁰ in not being able to operate in ways that demonstrate a respect of environmental and ecological integrity in the oil-bearing communities of Africa (Evuleocha 2005:331).

This chapter therefore uses a post-colonial critical exegesis theologically to affirm the creation or cultural mandate in our pericope as not necessarily implying a human rule over creation in an absolute sense, but rule exercised in a rationale, humane and accountable manner. Human destiny is to face the world and to live with other creatures, some of which are dangerous, but all of which are to be ruled and cared for. The destiny of the human creation is to live in God's world with God's other creatures on God's terms (Brueggemann 2002:40).

Responsibility in view of human rights and dignity

The redefinition of 'divine nature' in human beings implies a responsibility to highlight the requirements for human rights

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40. The multinational oil companies include Agip (Italian); Chevron (USA); Esso; Globe; Nigeria National Petroleum Company (NNPC); Shell (British-Dutch); Texaco (USA); Total (French), to mention the most notorious in environmental pollution and land degradation in the areas bordering on the gulf of Guinea and in Angola. In the case of Nigeria these companies have been in oil exploration etc. for over a half century.

and human dignity inherent in the concept of the *imago Dei*. This is true especially when the ongoing struggle for self-definition and identity within various Niger Delta ethnic communities is considered. In the Niger Delta, for instance, each human being belongs to a kindred and community condensed in a host of social relationships, at the helm of which is a gerontocracy. Shorthand references to the various ethnic groups within the area are often based on the territory inhabited by them, as for example Ogba and Ekpeye. Therefore, group identity of local communities is based on kinship in a very critical and crucial way. Without this the strategies of inclusion or exclusion from the ‘immediate’⁴¹ enjoyment of the rights inherent in the ‘divine nature’, or ‘*imago Dei*’ with which humans inveterately identify are short-changed. Yet this identity is being seriously jeopardised by human rights violations⁴² and the identity crisis inherent in the Nigerian state itself now carried

41. An immediate benefit includes compensation for cash crops destroyed in land excavation and burrowing by the oil companies, and which is usually a meagre payment even though the damage done to the crops and land is of a permanent and irreparable nature. The Federal Government still claims the bulk of royalty payment on such land and minerals derived from it and are not accountable to the people in doing so.

42. This is being written at a time when a combined force of the Nigerian army, navy, air force and police (the so called Joint Task Force) is combing the streets of Nigeria’s main oil city of Port Harcourt, shooting and killing in order to halt dissidents and militants who are bent on interrupting the entire oil industry in the Niger Delta until the resource owners are given a better deal by both the Federal Government and the multinational oil companies. Several Nigerian newspapers and the BBC News of 02–29 July are replete with reports of this nature. Visit <http://www.nigeriaworld.com> or <http://www.thisdayonline.com> for details.

over into its constituent parts. The exceptional diversity amongst various Nigerian peoples in respect of modes of social organisation, coupled with the fluidity and mobility of social identities resulting from a centralised and nationalised resource pool, betray a post-structuralist imperialistic post-colonial state. It has not only undermined the peoples' dignity but also their sense of responsibility and corporate existence by pitching one group against the other.

In other words, there is a premeditated and concerted effort aimed at undermining the Divine or cultural mandate in the Genesis creation story when all the terrorist acts of brigandage going on around the world are taken into consideration. It literally means that humans no longer express the divine character, neither do they care about those interested in fulfilling their procreative functions. Both of these, once again, are important because dominion can only be exercised over the living creatures and nature generally to the extent that humans occupy the earth physically in a manner that truly reflects the divine image and likeness (Cassuto 1978:58–59).

This is the point at which the works and writings of Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965) come into focus in this paper. It resonates with the heart and essence of the divine mandate. It also commends a 'reverence for life' in tandem with the *imago Dei*.

■ Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965)

In the views of Albert Schweitzer, 'life was too sacred to be wasted in battle-fields that do not contribute to the expansion of God's kingdom'. His stance was that humans should enjoy a peaceful and tranquil environment at the hands of civil and spiritual authorities. The success of his views earned him a Nobel Peace Prize in 1952. He actively opposed the acquisition and deployment of weapons of mass destruction, resulting on a strong position taken by the United Nations on the ban against the use of the atomic, the nuclear and the neutron bombs, including a ban on the deployment of intercontinental ballistic missiles during conventional warfare.

This great theologian, philosopher, musician and physician was described as a human dynamo and as several individuals put together. He was not only zealous in the acquisition of knowledge but also actively engaged in knowledge dissemination and application. Beside his many-sided education in Germany – his homeland, Albert was also an articulate writer. His theological exposition was popularised by his book: *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God* (1901), a few years before another book titled: *The Quest for the historical Jesus* published in 1906 had hit the literary market (Pierard 1984:986, 987).

In the latter, he pointed out that all modern reconstructions of the life of Jesus simply attributed the liberal theology of their authors to Jesus in a much unwarranted style. These liberal

theologians simply ignore Jesus' commitment to an imminent apocalypse, which Schweitzer considered so imperative as to warrant his separation to a life of absolute righteousness and entire sanctification. His hope of entering the Kingdom of God was a glowing one throughout his life and in the subsequent life of his disciples. In the former, he reflected on several human mystical views, including French, Indian and German views, depicting a 'reverence for life'. However, these peaceful attributes were lacking in the belligerent posture adopted by both the German and French authorities respectively as the events of the First World War regrettably unfolded.

During the period of the interwar years during which Albert lived, perilous times shrouded the living conditions of Europeans. However, his religious stance raised many who otherwise would have been despondent and desperate. Simply put, his perspective on 'reverence for life' captured in his ethical theory was contained in his third book: *The Philosophy of Civilization* and is synonymous with human moral devotion to God as well as with an affirmation of all human lives. All nature shares the will to live, but only humans can recognise this common bond. In Schweitzer's view humans must cherish the life of all beings equally and should not be given to the elimination or termination of lives – not even those of insects and plants because of their importance to human environmental and ecological life in general. To Schweitzer this constitutes the core theme of Jesus' ethical teachings. Apparently, some critics

say that Schweitzer's perspective on affirmation of human lives has been influenced more by his childhood upbringing and by his acquaintance with Hindu and Jainist doctrines of *Ahimsa* (non-harm) than by his missionary experiences in Gabon, Africa (Price 1988:623–624).

Of particular interest is Albert Schweitzer's work in Gabon, West Africa, which depicted his love for Jesus and his willingness to follow the Spirit of Jesus by showing his hosts what this meant – sacrifice for and service to vulnerable humanity! He was not nearly as concerned about traditional Christian dogma as he was about the ethical aspects of the doctrines of Christ, and the high premium this placed on the respect for individual rights to life and to self-actualisation (Pierard 1984:986–987). Schweitzer has been described as a versatile scholar who devoted himself to the service of humanity through his writings and his extensive works of charity by which he reached out to the homeless and to ex-convicts.

He became a missionary to the East African country of Gabon and with the support of his wife and some locals he established the first rural hospital in Lambarene, Gabon. His innovative approach to the well-being of the locals did not, however, go down well with the French colonial authorities and so Albert was mandated to leave the area. As far as the authorities of the French colonial office were concerned the young German missionary was more of an enemy alien.

■ African humanism

The continent of Africa often has been referred to by European explorers as the 'dark continent' during the earlier centuries preceding this age of globalisation. Moreover, the 21st century has positioned Africa as the 'cradle of humanism' where primordial sentiments are high, and people do all within their powers to promote parochial interests, even at the expense of a so-called 'general good'. Moreover, events on the continent of Africa are no longer shrouded in secrecy and 'cultism' but can now be captured in any part of the globe via satellite. Not only does Africa enjoy the fruits of global technological innovations in the fields of communication, medical care, education, economics and governance, but she also contributes to this ongoing process with her God-given natural and human resources. According to Ehusani (1991):

Young African intellectuals have started registering their presence in the arts and sciences, thus enriching the scientific movement and the technological civilization with the African genius. (p. 5, 13ff)

Conversely, however, there has been the resultant danger which this technological innovation has posed to humanity, not only in Africa, but globally. In the days of Albert Schweitzer, it led to the decimation of two Japanese cities – Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Various categories of weapons of mass destruction today threaten with extinction the entire human race. Moreover, there is the daily routine of economic, political and social insecurity with rampant cases of armed robberies and violation

of human rights, insurgency, kidnappings, ritual murders and terrorism now witnessed in continental Africa with an attendant poisoning of the human environment by multinational oil companies. The inhabitants of Nigeria's Niger Delta live under a very polluted and degrading environment resulting from chemical wastes and fumes pumped into their natural environment from the exploration, exploitation and exportation of crude petroleum and other natural mineral resources. This pollution hazard has been going on for more than forty years and has created various environmental and ecologically related diseases.

Worse still, the militarisation of Africa has become worrisome not only to the African Union but also to the global community. At any given time in the last decade or two there have been at least twenty wars in progress in various parts of the world, with Africa having its fair share of the same. These do not include the intermittent acts of insurgency and terrorism with the use of offensive and defensive weapons (Ehusani 1991):

Perpetrated not only by the weak against the strong, but oftentimes by the powerful against the weak. Millions of human lives are destroyed in these wars and armed clashes and many of them who survive are either reduced to the status of refugees, die of starvation and deprivation or from the epidemics that result from these wars, or they remain physically and psychologically maimed for life. (p. 8)

As we speak a new phenomenon of internally displaced persons in Nigeria, which was zero in 1999, has by 2015 risen to nearly

one million persons of north-eastern Nigeria origin – the net effect of *Boko Haram* insurgency.

Not only is the traditional African humanism and respect for human lives under threat, but also the 'reverence for life' once preached on the continent by Albert Schweitzer seems now forgotten, and the whole doctrine of '*imago*' and '*similuto Dei*', which is part of the cosmogony of both Judaism, Christianity and Islam, is being gravely assaulted. African scholars like Bolaji Idowu and John S. Mbiti have in their respective ways pointed at the human person as the handiwork of the Supreme Being (Idowu 1996), which informs the African primordial commitment to religious and spiritual values, though not ignoring the mundane and material (Mbiti 1969). A fitting summary to this discussion is a paper the present author presented to Amnesty International Business Group (AIBG) in Stockholm, Sweden in the winter of 2006 and which was published as an article in a reputable Nigerian journal in 2009 (Ahiamadu 2009:87), a quote from a section of which reads (Wright 1990):

There is the perspective of African moral religion which is in consonance with both Old Testament (OT) and Islamic laws, and which considers human rights as pointing to the rights of individuals to share in the produce from the land, to a personal pursuit of happiness, to life and liberty. These rights and numerous other rights which are in congruity with African moral religion are deeply entrenched in African Traditional Religion (ATR) and in the Canon of both OT and *Islam*. For instance, in the OT the Decalogue protected individual human rights such as the

right to conscience, to recreation, to life, to family, to property, to a good association or reputation, and the right to liberty. In this way the individual's relationship to God is protected so that a violation of an individual's rights was considered an interference with that individual's commitment or devotion to God. (p. 136)

■ Conclusion

In this chapter, humans made in the image of God are considered responsible moral agents in God's universe. The creation of the first man shows this: the subduing of the earth, that is, the whole of culture, is given to him, and can be given to him only because he is created after God's image (Cassuto 1978:58). Humans can be rulers of the earth only because, and in so far as they are servants, sons and daughters of God. It is doubtful, however, if humans have built on this foundation of sonship. Instead, humankind has taken a subservient role and not always followed a normal course as evidenced in the numerous wars, revolutions and catastrophes all over the world.

At present the '*imago Dei*' has been grossly assaulted as peaceful and unsuspecting inhabitants are sent to their untimely graves by the activities of terrorists and insurgents as well as by multinational oil companies whose operations in developing economies jeopardise environmental health and integrity of human lives. The experience of Nigeria shows that the sense of responsibility imbued in the '*imago*' and '*similitudo Dei*' is lacking: both in the public sector – where the enforcement of basic

human rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is coupled with the implementation of environmental laws – and with respect to the ecological integrity of host communities (Evuleocha 2005:331).

Neither is the 'reverence for life' expounded by Albert Schweitzer in his ethical theory anywhere upheld in the private sector. Not only is the traditional African humanism and respect for human lives under threat, but also the 'reverence for life' once preached on the continent by Albert Schweitzer seems now forgotten, and the whole doctrine of '*imago*' and '*similitudo Dei*' which is part of the cosmogony of both Judaism, Christianity and Islam is being gravely assaulted. African scholars like Bolaji Idowu and John S. Mbiti have, in their respective ways, pointed at the human person as the handiwork of the Supreme Being (Idowu 1996), which informs the African primordial commitment to human religious and spiritual values as essentially complementary to the mundane and material (Mbiti 1969).

It is therefore our recommendation that human innate reverence for life, which is synonymous with the '*imago Dei*' and with human moral devotion to God should be complimented by an affirmation of human life by all. All nature shares the will to live but only humans can recognise this common bond. We must cherish the life of all beings equally and should not be given to elimination or termination of lives – not even those of

insects and plants because of their importance to human environmental and ecological life in general. This is the point of view that resonates with African humanism, the Canons of Old Testament and Islam as well as with Albert Schweitzer's concept of reverence of, and for, human life.

■ Chapter 4: Summary

We live in a modern world where military conflict exists in 30 of the world's 192 countries and one in which oil exploration, exploitation and exportation result in environmental degradation and ecological distortions in Africa's oil-producing nations, including Nigeria. Whilst the former has bred various levels of violence (viz. rape, abduction, insurgency, terrorism and ritual murders, etc.), the latter have, for their part, contributed negatively to global warming, environmental pollution and ecologically related diseases. This chapter critically examines the biblical mandate in which humans are placed to care for the earth and, particularly, for the protection of human lives. It reflects on Albert Schweitzer's concept of a 'reverence for life' in practical resonance with the '*imago*' and '*similitudo Dei*' enunciated as a common human heritage in Biblical narratives. It brings African humanism (with its inherent commitment to the preservation, promotion, protection and prosperity of human lives) into a critical dialogue with '*imago Dei*' and 'reverence for life' against the backdrop of insurgency, terrorism, kidnappings and abuse of human rights. These vices

today characterise every facet of human social, economic and political life in the countries of the world, particularly in oil-rich Nigeria. It recommends that human innate reverence for life, which is synonymous with the '*imago Dei*' and with human moral devotion to God, should be complemented by an affirmation of the human life of all in keeping with Albert Schweitzer's philosophy on reverence for life.

Mysticism of the heart and life: Schweitzer's reverence for life as autobiographical philosophy

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■ Introduction

Research into Albert Schweitzer's philosophical work has not been in vogue for quite some time. The important writings of Oskar Kraus (1950), Henry Clark (1962) and George Seaver (1969) are now dated and attest to the lack of research over the

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last 50 years into Schweitzer's work. Kraus's semi-biographical works emerged from his close friendship with Schweitzer. Schweitzer and Kraus both engaged in life writing, in that they reflect on their ideas in relation to their lived experiences – in Kraus's case, his close friendship with Schweitzer. In this chapter I will pick up the trend of life writing by focusing on Schweitzer's autobiographical writing.⁴³ This enables us to assess the development of Schweitzer's thinking in relation to his experience and his reflection of these experiences through his life writing in his major autobiography, *My life and thought* (1956a). I will analyse to what extent Schweitzer integrates his experience of reverence for life into his philosophy, culminating in an analysis of his Nobel Peace Prize commemorative speech. In my analysis, I will refer to Paul Ricoeur's theory of attestation.

In this chapter, I explore the roots of Schweitzer's central idea of reverence for life in the three genres in which he wrote, namely philosophy, autobiography and theological writings. I have chosen *Civilization and ethics* (1955) to represent his philosophical writings, *My life and thought* (1956a) amongst his autobiographical writings and the *Quest for the historical Jesus* (1956b) amongst his theological writings. In analysing reverence for life, critics on Schweitzer have focused on the literary roots of his writings, namely his studies of Western and Eastern thought (1955 and 1936), but they have not adequately recognised the role of his

43. James Olney describes life writing as 'the validation [and] necessity ... of writing one's life, of finding the words that signify the self and its history' (1998:2).

autobiography in providing an understanding of his philosophy. I will demonstrate that his autobiographical writings provide a crucial lens through which to view the formation of his elemental philosophy, which forms the basis for his notion of reverence for life. I will also turn to his political-ethical writings in the latter part of his life, which focused on the anti-nuclear weapons campaign, to show how influential reverence for life was in fashioning his political thought (Schweitzer 1954a).

Schweitzer's philosophical ideas reached their fruition when he left Europe. He completed *Civilization and ethics* (1955:240–264) in Africa where he articulated his concept of reverence for life. His departure for Africa was in part motivated by his dissatisfaction with the presentation of modern concepts in cultural and religious spheres (Schweitzer 1956a:173) which had, according to him, lost touch with the ideas of the Enlightenment. He felt that this problematic view of civilisation would lead to a repression of otherness and to a large-scale disrespect for life (Schweitzer 1956a:232), which, in many ways, presaged World War 1 (Schweitzer 1956a:177). He left for Africa in 1913 in order to get away from the dominant narratives that informed 'world views' in Europe and to explore ways to make thought more meaningful to the individual and to lived experience (Schweitzer 1956a:173). Schweitzer sought to establish life-view as separate from world views and as meaningful in itself, an approach that dovetails with my approach of exploring life writing in relation to experience and

life-view (Schweitzer 1956a:180). Schweitzer's autobiographical writings document the beginnings of his thoughts about elemental philosophy. This, in turn, provides a nuanced understanding of his concept of reverence for life. Whilst his autobiography provides a chronology of events and thoughts in his life, an analysis of the sequence and description of these events provides a picture of the development of his thinking. The main focus of this chapter is Schweitzer's experience of reverence for life on a barge sailing down the Ogooué River in Gabon. This moment is central, because it was a resolution *at an experiential level* of the issues and questions Schweitzer had been asking about Western civilisation and the Enlightenment, in particular. A study of his autobiography reveals that his thinking had led him up to the point of experiencing reverence for life. I will explore the experiences that led up to this moment in order to trace its origin. I will also assess how successfully Schweitzer integrated this experience into his philosophy and daily practices. Ultimately, I will assess how Schweitzer integrated his experience of reverence for life into his political thought in the latter period of his life when he engaged with the politics of nuclear disarmament. A study of his autobiography *My life and thought* (1956a) reveals that these insights came to him through direct sensory experience whilst working as a doctor in Africa (Schweitzer 1956a:191). He then channelled these insights into answering questions that had plagued him regarding modern civilisation's interpretation of the Enlightenment and the

historical Jesus. His resulting philosophy of reverence for life is based on a profound critique of received ideas concerning Enlightenment philosophy and religion in late 19th-century Europe. Schweitzer thus represents a distinctive shift in Western thought away from a Western materialistic world view towards affirming personal experience and ethical responsibility.

■ Theoretical framework

Schweitzer's autobiographical writings offer first-person accounts of how his ideas developed in relation to lived experience. In order to analyse his autobiographical writing and correlate it with his philosophical and theological writings, I draw on Paul Ricoeur's theory of attestation, as described in *Oneself as another* (1994). Attestation is not a purely subjective state of consciousness, but rather one that is derived from complex relations between the sense of self in relation to the other and one's sense of self in relation to oneself (Ricoeur 1994:2–3). Attestation affirms the position of the articulator within a complex state of identity that implies an indelible connection to otherness (Ricoeur 1994:3). Ricoeur makes a distinction between two different concepts of identity, *ipse* and *idem*: *idem* denotes a sense of a fixed identity in time, whereas *ipse* points to an understanding of identity devoid of an 'unchanging core personality'. *Ipse* identity, for Ricoeur (1994:3), 'involves a dialectical complementarity ... namely the dialectic of self and the other than self'. In this sense the relation between

self and otherness is not of two distinct categories set in comparison with each other. Instead, the title *Oneself as another* 'implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought without the other' (Ricoeur 1994:3). In addition, the dynamic relation between *idem* and *ipse* identities allows for a fluid sense of self in relation to external influences. Together, the two identities combine to produce a more stable sense of mental or interior life (Ricoeur 1994:118:119). According to Ricoeur, a person who attests asserts the position held, encompassing its frailty, tentativeness and confidence (Ricoeur 1994:21). Seen from this perspective, autobiography becomes a crucially important source of knowledge because it expresses knowledge and experience from sources other than the dominant narratives in society, giving voice to complex personal narratives that reflect against dominant discourses. It is from the vantage point of autobiography that we can appreciate alternative views of reality and find a meeting point for discussion. This focus allows us to recognise the role personal reflexivity plays in the course a life takes and the decisions a person makes. I will show that this dynamic is central to the relationship between Schweitzer's autobiographical writing and his philosophical writings.

The concept of attestation affords Schweitzer's spiritual ideas and ethical-mystical philosophy a contemporary philosophical grounding in that it allows for a subtle consideration of the subjective aspect of consciousness, which always, to some

degree, remains impregnable. Analysing Schweitzer's writings at the hand of attestation theory allows us to perceive contradictions and ambivalences within his life and thought. For example, it is possible to analyse Schweitzer's works as exemplars of colonial discourse. Yet a more subtle reading of his work through the lens of his autobiography reveals a person actively engaged in working through a life experience within his own context, attempting to understand the mystical experience of reverence for life intellectually, throughout a lifetime of reflection. The *idem* aspects of Schweitzer's thoughts are revealed in the paternalistic aspects of his African writings. Nevertheless, where he offers critique of the colonialism observed in Gabon he displays *ipse* characteristics in that he takes the plight of black Africans into his own identity (Schweitzer 1956a:227).

Ricoeur argues that the articulating self should be understood as encompassing a totality of awareness, including the sense of affirmation, doubt, subjectivity and the encroachment of the object into the subject's consciousness (Ricoeur 1994:3, 21). Combining Ricoeur with Schweitzer's terminology, the theoretical apparatus of attestation enables the elucidation of the complexities of life-view through autobiography. Whilst Schweitzer's terminology of the 'other' for example in his use of racist terms 'savage' and 'primitives' in *My life and thought* (1956a:167) is distinctly colonial, a study of his thinking reveals an intention to move beyond the conceptual strictures of

Western colonial discourse coupled with increasing doubt of the dominant Enlightenment project (Schweitzer 1955:202). Schweitzer's life-view, which emerges in his autobiography, proposes a complete rethinking of civilisation along lines aimed at world peace and compassion.

■ The philosophical context of Schweitzer's thought

It is apparent in Schweitzer's autobiography that he writes within the philosophical framework of the Enlightenment with particular reference to German idealism, for example Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Whilst critical of Enlightenment thinkers in general for their inability to secure clearly defined concepts (as I will explore later), he is most sympathetic to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Schweitzer argues that it is impossible to discount or ignore the importance of Enlightenment thought, but it is imperative for the peaceful coexistence of all life on earth that human thought becomes 'elemental' or authentically related to being as it is immediately experienced (Schweitzer 1956a:185). Schweitzer maintains in his autobiography that the plethora of life-forms on Earth embody will-to-live, which one encounters immediately in one's own experience. Such a philosophical framework is important because it is based on a life-view and not on a world view (1956a:262). For Schweitzer, the fundamental error of the majority of Western philosophy, including

Christianity, is the attempt to establish a world view that is not founded on lived experience (Schweitzer 1956a:185). This error results in an over-reaching life-view masquerading as a world view, as exemplified most comprehensively in Hegel's philosophy (Schweitzer 1955:141). Schweitzer's voice is complex revealing a fluid identity with contradictory discourses, echoing both Ricoeur's conflicting *idem* and *ipse* identities. At times he is downright derogatory (Schweitzer 1956a:167), at other times he wants to find a position of dignity for black Africans in colonial narrative (Schweitzer 1954b:86). To a degree his aim to establish, via mystical ethics, a mode of existence which gives dignity to all life amidst the plethora of life forms competing for survival is partly achieved. This can be seen in his commemorative address on winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952 (Schweitzer 1954a). I will return to this point later.

My argument is that the route to understanding Schweitzer's formulation of reverence for life is through exploring Schweitzer's autobiography. It provides unique, integrated insights into his philosophy that are not available via the singular routes of theological or philosophical analysis. Such an autobiographical reading leads to an approach which connects humans as thinking beings to others, whilst accepting the complexity of such a relation. His approach found the Enlightenment project unclear. He questions whether it can

provide the epistemological clarity that it claims to do. He therefore sought insight through different routes.

According to Schweitzer (1956a:32), this conceptual obscurity, particularly in Kant's thought, leads to the unfounded notion of civilisation that informs Western culture and gives licence to colonialism and imperialism (Schweitzer 1955:109). By contrast, awareness of the intricacies of shared lived experiences, which forms the basis of Schweitzer's understanding of ethical civilisation, provides an ethical foundation for civilisation to which colonial exploitation and subjugation would be anathema. Nevertheless, as I will argue later, Schweitzer was unable fully to integrate his views on colonialism into his ethical philosophy. He still retained colonial racial categories in his discourse, also in his later life.

■ Discontent with the Enlightenment

In this section I will discuss Schweitzer's comments in his autobiography about Enlightenment thought. Schweitzer's autobiography, *My life and thought* (1956a), documents his growing dissatisfaction with the Enlightenment. In his autobiography he laments that, despite a great Western heritage in the form of the Enlightenment, Western civilisation was indifferent to inhumane ideas and this inhumanity was perpetuated by governments' lack of zeal for justice. At a dinner party when he was a student he heard the assertion,

‘Why, we are all of us nothing but “Epigoni”!’ He continues: ‘It struck home with me, like a flash of lightning, because it put into words what I myself felt (about Western civilization)’ (Schweitzer 1956a:173, 2005:15). Schweitzer believed his generation found the standards of values set by preceding generations too high and, in response, they had settled for external material progress and the pragmatic politics of *Realpolitik* (Schweitzer 1956a:173).

My life and thought is written from a temporal perspective which affords the reader the opportunity to proceed apace with the development of Schweitzer’s thought, from his youth as a student of philosophy and theology, into his maturity as an itinerant lecturer and medical doctor in Africa. For Schweitzer, Western civilisation is founded on the notion of abstract reasoning, derived from Descartes’ concept of an abstract thinking subject as the ultimate touchstone for action (Descartes 1968:54). Schweitzer, however, wishes to embrace different criteria for making decisions which assert the primacy of personal experience as the basis of ethics in place of the abstract concepts of subjectivity that outlined the idea of the individual in Descartes’ and later Kant’s thought (Kant 2007:80; Scruton 1982:24). In Schweitzer’s autobiography, he calls for the practice of civilisation to be revisited. The consequences, he observes, of the empty thought that undergirds modern civilisation are brutal colonialism and the devastation of the First World War (Schweitzer 1956a:189).

In *My life and thought*, Schweitzer draws attention to elusive ideas that parade as foundational concepts in Western civilisation. There is evidence, even in his early theological and philosophical texts, *The quest for the historical Jesus* (first published in 1910) and his doctorate on Kant (written in 1899) of this masking of indeterminate ideas behind an artifice of metaphysical clarity. Schweitzer identifies this trend in Enlightenment thinking and critiques it (Schweitzer 1955:29, 35, 106). It is significant that Schweitzer focuses on Jesus and Kant in his early research because in Jesus lie the roots of Western morality and in Kant lies the root of Enlightenment thought. Indeed, in critiquing Kant, Schweitzer is effectively critiquing the foundation of Enlightenment philosophy. Writing about his doctorate on Kant in *My life and thought*, Schweitzer argues that Kant feigns continuity between pure reason and practical reason (Schweitzer 1955:112, 1956a:33). On close interrogation, however, the formative ideas in pure reason become more intuitive and more spiritual in practical reason. Schweitzer argues that the religious declarations in *Critique of practical reason* are raised beyond those inferred in the *Critique of pure reason* and, therefore, the ethics contained in the two books are inconsistent. Schweitzer declares in *My life and thought* that, in the *Critique of practical reason*, moral law is religiously ‘deeper’ than in the *Critique of pure reason*. *Critique of practical reason* asserts the three cornerstone ideas: of God, freedom and immortality. These concepts, however, are not so firmly

established in the *Critique of pure reason's* insistence on the categorical imperative which shapes the perception and knowledge of the world. Kant's suggestion that there is a seamless logic between the two books is ill-founded (Schweitzer 1956a:33) and his philosophy of religion is not consistent. His philosophy in *Critique of pure reason* cannot match the more intuitive claim for moral action in *Critique of practical reason* and, therefore, his ethical ideas are inconsistently applied. Schweitzer explains in his autobiography that Kant's early religious writings, whilst they form part of the introduction to *Critique of pure reason*, are never explored in the text. His use of the term 'transcendental' in *Critique of pure reason* is never explored. The problem is further exacerbated in *Critique of practical reason* when Kant explores spiritual notions of God, freedom and immortality which are at odds with his philosophy in *Critique of pure reason* (Körner 1964:152; Schweitzer 1956a:32).

In *The quest for the historical Jesus* (1956b), Schweitzer continues to interrogate the Enlightenment project by looking at 19th- and twentieth-century studies of Jesus. He applies a historical method to show how 19th-century theologians tried to depict Jesus as speaking directly to their age's liberal and rational world view. Schweitzer shows that Paul was right in placing Jesus' life and ministry in a late-Rabbinic world view, infused with messianic and eschatological ideas – a world view that was foreign to the Enlightenment (Schweitzer 1953: 83 84).

Schweitzer's solution to this problem is that we must read Jesus' teachings with an awareness of his world view and then delve into the spiritual teaching of love that lies hidden in his message. Schweitzer writes in *My life and thought* that the theologians Wrede, Strauss and Bauer cast Jesus as a modern thinker embracing rationalism and liberalism (Schweitzer 1956a: 168–175). As views of Jesus are historically constructed, he avers that it is impossible to discover the actual historical Jesus.

In *My life and thought*, Schweitzer begins to notice the consequences of the thought world established by abstract and unsubstantiated Enlightenment ideas of Western civilisation. He writes of labour becoming specialised and functionary because people are being seen in an alienated and mechanised way. He starts to recognise that labour should be to the benefit of humanity and should express the spirit of humanity beyond circumscribed market-related labour. It seems probable that Schweitzer's positive reflections on social action against social distress were influenced by Marx (Schweitzer 1955:160). He began to see the flaws in the idea of progress in Western civilisation. The more human progress was not realised, the more there was a concomitant movement to *Realpolitik* based on maintaining power and material factors. Schweitzer's concerns were realised in the outbreak of the brutal World War in 1914. His belief that the values of his generation were inhumane was borne out by

history. For him, the First World War was a consequence of civilisation inheriting an empty set of values from the world views and philosophy of the past. Progress had become an empty phrase which had lost its spirituality and had become an empty and materialistic external expression (Schweitzer 1956a:173). Later in his autobiography Schweitzer mentions the idea of elemental thought as the route to world and life-affirmation when he writes (Schweitzer 1956a):

Elemental thinking is that which starts from fundamental questions about the relations of man to the universe, about the meaning of life, and about the nature of goodness. (p. 260)

We can glean from this quotation that what Schweitzer means by 'elemental' is an idea that is fundamental to the survival of life that will reach into perpetuity. Later, in his Nobel Prize address, he makes the same connection between spirituality and elemental thought which, by then, he understood as synonymous with reverence for life.

The core of this idea is already apparent in his writings on the historical Jesus, rooted in the sense of the mystery and riddle of life encapsulated in Jesus' teachings. If 'world view' is a riddle and mystery, then thought should settle on life-view as its foundation for being. Life-view should therefore be founded on itself or be derived from immediate experience of life. Elemental thought takes the world as it is and reflects on the individual's own experience. In this way thought shifts away from epistemology and towards the ethical. This, for

Schweitzer, is the essence of religion and it is what Jesus exhorts his followers to do (1956a:250). In *My life and thought* Schweitzer explains that elemental thought begins with inwardness. One recognises one's experience as will. He identifies the early exploration of these ideas in Stoicism, 'that man must bring himself into a spiritual relation with the world, and become one with it. In essence Stoicism is a nature philosophy which ends in mysticism' (Schweitzer 1956a:261). From this, we can infer that life-view implies finding meaning in the immediate experience and acceptance of the broader inexpressible secret of existence. Written into this position is the passive acceptance of existence, one's own existence and the other existences met in immediate experience. Herein lies the root of Schweitzer's ethical mysticism – to live with a humane attitude of sincere reflection on all existences (Schweitzer 1956a:235:269).

In philosophy he sees this similar thought in Socrates and in a combined reading of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche (Nietzsche 1983:174; Plato 1956:340; Schopenhauer 1909: loc. 345). In religion, he sees this same attitude in Chinese Taoism. He finds Buddhism and Hinduism too focused on a withdrawal from worldliness and modern Christianity too focused on optimism (Schweitzer 1956a:262). He finds in Jesus' early teachings, however, the forgotten call to reflect on being (Schweitzer 1956a:185). There is in Schweitzer's latter point the echo of

reflecting on being in Ricoeur's concept of attestation in the articulation of personal meaning, based on personal reflexivity.

■ Will and representation

In this section, I will explore Schweitzer's preference for reflexive and introspective thought. The introspective tradition has its roots in the Christian tradition of Pauline and Augustinian writings (Olney 1998:80). The idea is that one has an inner 'space' where thoughts and actions complement each other as the individual progresses towards God's love. Schweitzer prioritises the dimension of interiority, which is found in many writings. His emphasis on interiority overlaps with Ricoeur's notion of attestation where the expression of personal meaning of the subject is based on reflection and experience. He also finds resonances of introspection in the Western philosophical tradition in Socrates (particularly in connection with the idea of the inner voice or *daimon*), Schopenhauer and Nietzsche (Schweitzer 1955:32).

The psychological idea of representation in Western thought has many sources, but the route that Schweitzer follows is via German idealism as propounded by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Fichte. Schopenhauer criticised Kant's idea of the thing-in-itself, which is the essence (*noumenon*) of something which cannot be known by the senses. In its place, Schopenhauer argued for the existence of a universal will that fashions the

world according to its own representations (Schopenhauer 1909:location 356). Representations are therefore not physically stable, but equivocal in nature and subject to interpretation (Schweitzer 1955:73–79). The individual remains trapped in the particularity of his or her representation. The resonances between Ricoeur and Schweitzer become apparent in that attestation and Schweitzer's understanding of will both assume that understanding arises from reflecting on immediate experience rather than on abstract or metaphysical categories.

Although Schweitzer recognises the fashioning power of context, as witnessed in his writings on the historical Jesus, he is not deterministic in his thinking. More accurately, Schweitzer emphasises the primacy of subjective experience and the ability of the mind to reflect ethically within its context and arrive at mystical ethical principles in specific contexts. In this sense, Schweitzer breaks from Descartes' thought wherein recognition of thinking as a precondition for being is not primarily based on an ontological condition, but is rather a method to disprove scepticism and affirm life (Scruton 1984:31). His dictum, 'I am life which wills to live, in the midst of life which wills to live' (Schweitzer 1956a:186) does not suggest an abstract conscious entity such as in Descartes' assertion of 'I think; so I must exist' (Schweitzer 1956a:186). Rather, in Schweitzer's case, identity is asserted through an immediate experience of all-encompassing Will.

This matrix of ideas in Schweitzer's writings is focused on the term life-view in his main philosophical text, *Civilization and ethics* (Schweitzer 1955:205). Life-view is grounded in individual experience within a particular context. Life-view is formulated from the process of reflecting on experience in relation to one's understanding of spirituality or the inner relation to an idea of the divine. From this reflection, ethical action is established in a person's life (Schweitzer 1955:205). Life-view is set against world view in Schweitzer's writings. World view is a philosophical or religious system external to individual experience. Schweitzer argues that the vast majority of Western thought is written from the perspective of world view rather than life-view, with the exception of a few thinkers such as Socrates, the Earl of Shaftesbury (Schweitzer 1955:86), Schopenhauer and Nietzsche (Schweitzer 1955:163–178). Schweitzer's attraction to Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's thoughts means that he opposes the grand metaphysical architecture in the German idealist tradition exemplified by Hegel's philosophy (Schweitzer 1955:141). For Schweitzer there is no meaning in nature (Schweitzer 1955:204), whereas Hegel wrote of an extensive meaning developing in nature through the dialectical process of Spirit and History (Hegel 1990:30). For Schweitzer, therefore, meaning is established in the core of the individual's lived experience (Schweitzer 1955:237), whilst for Hegel meaning becomes clearer in the external world as time unfolds (Hegel 1974:252). Schweitzer, by contrast, always maintains a disjuncture

between natural events and a person's desire for peace. Nature, argues Schweitzer, 'knows only a blind affirmation of life' (Schweitzer 1955:222). Nevertheless, Schweitzer asserts that in humanity life-affirmation becomes prone to inner reflection or a turning away from outer phenomena (life-negating in Schweitzer's terms) to arrive at a commitment to the protection of all life (Schweitzer 1955:222). Indeed, therefore, it is this very disconnection between nature and the human desire for peace that forms the basis of ethics (Schweitzer 1955:222–223).

Ethics in Schweitzer's thought is derived from a combination of ethics and mysticism. He argues that ethics without mysticism leads to conventional thought, whilst mysticism without ethics leads to abstract thought (Schweitzer 1955:235). Ethical mysticism requires an ethical effort to raise ethics up from the brute ethics of convention and law to the spiritualised ethics of thought and 'resignation' or 'inward self-liberation from the world' (Schweitzer 1955:226). According to Schweitzer, this process sees the finite notes of convention transformed into awareness of infinite will (Schweitzer 1955:226). Herein lies the mysterious paradox in Schweitzer's thought – negating life, in the form of denying convention, through an inward turn becomes life-affirmation through the elevation of ethics.

The ethical effort that Schweitzer (1955:164, 219) refers to requires personal agency. Schweitzer turns to the German idealists Fichte, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche in reaction to the totalising abstract framework of Hegel. For Fichte,

Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, in different ways, the individual transforms basic will by forcing individual reflection inwards. Schweitzer's concept of self-perfection refers to a mental process where reflection on the multitude of wills is raised to a point where conflict between wills is transcended to experience the unity of will. In this sense, reflecting on will brings about a mystical realisation of the union of will. It is important to note that inner reflection on will in the process of self-perfection does not lead to an abstract understanding of will, but rather a practical ethic that extends to all life forms. One therefore develops reverence for life in all its forms through the immediate elemental thought on will in one's midst (Schweitzer 1955:239). Schweitzer argues that such elemental reflection leads to the development of a personal ethical life-view and not an imposed world view. For Schweitzer, ethics must operate at the level of the individual's relation to his or her sense of the divine (Schweitzer 1955:224). Such knowledge is indelibly connected to well-being. Schweitzer's search for a life-view not founded on a world view was begun, according to him, by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Schopenhauer's entire philosophy, it could be argued, was an attack on the Hegelian flavour of the day which subverted personal meaning to the abstract of total meaning of Hegel's thought. Schopenhauer's recognition of will as being the driving force of life is clearly fundamental to Schweitzer's thought.

■ Schweitzer's concept of reverence for life as attested statement

Ricoeur's concept of attestation describes the condition of a subject rooted in a contextual milieu, using the experiential footholds of that context in the meaning-making process. This framework resonates with Schweitzer's mystical ethics which is embedded in a direct mystical experience of one's immediate surroundings (Schweitzer 1956a:186). Attestation, argues Ricoeur, is different from the Platonic metacategories of Same and Other, or idea and appearance. Instead, the other is drawn into the identity of the subject. (Ricoeur 1994:298; Russell 1947:141–153). Ricoeur developed this idea initially on a theological footing in his book *The rule of metaphor*, first published in 1977 (Ricoeur 2003), where he avers that Aristotle, and later Aquinas, railed against Plato in terms of his categorical 'discourse of being' (Ricoeur 2003:324–326). Through the use of metaphors for God, for example a lion, the multiplicity of beings shares in the unity of God (Ricoeur 2003:328). In doing so Ricoeur allows for the possibility of ontology in the present (Ricoeur 1994:298). In his later book, *Oneself as Another* (first published in 1990), Ricoeur draws from his earlier ideas on metaphoricity (Ricoeur 1994:299) and asserts that the idea of attestation 'accounts for human action actually *happening* in the world' ... 'on the very level of the mode of being of the self' (Ricoeur 1994:301). It is, therefore, important to reiterate that

attestation is a *subjective* response to the actual context in which the subject finds him- or herself.

Here it is useful to return to Schweitzer's profoundly transforming experience on the barge of reverence of life. He writes that he had been attempting, unsuccessfully, to understand the modern world view for a prolonged period of time which had rendered him depleted and 'disheartened' (Schweitzer 1955:184). Schweitzer writes evocatively that (Schweitzer 1956a):

While in this mental condition I had to undertake a longish journey on the river ... in September 1915 – when I was summoned to visit Madame Pelot, the ailing wife of a missionary, at N'Gômô, about 160 miles upstream. The only means of conveyance I could find was a small steamer, towing an overladen barge ... Except for myself, there were only natives on board, but among them was Emil Ogouma, my friend from Lambaréné. Since I had been in too much of a hurry to provide myself with enough food for the journey, they let me share the content of their cooking-pot. Slowly we crept upstream ... Lost in thought I sat on the deck of the barge, struggling to find the elementary and the universal conception of the ethical which I had not discovered in any philosophy ... Late on the third day, at the very moment when, at sunset, we were making our way through a herd of hippopotamuses, there flashed upon my mind, unforeseen and unsought, the phrase, 'Reverence for Life'. The iron door had yielded: the path in the thicket had become visible. Now I had found my way to the idea in which world- and life-affirmation and ethics are contained side by side! Now I knew that the world-view of ethical world- and life-affirmation, together with its ideals of civilization, is founded on thought. (p. 185)

Whilst Schweitzer's autobiography delineates his rootedness in Western culture and thought, he gives voice to an emerging critique of Enlightenment values and philosophy that externalise progress and concepts (Schweitzer 1955:201). His critique is based on a deep reading of the roots of modern thought, harking back to Socrates' fundamental questioning of epistemology. It was, however, only in his retreat to the colonial outpost of Gabon that he was able to develop his critique of Western enlightenment thought, beginning in 1915 with his barge journey experience of reverence for life (Schweitzer 1956a:185). Schweitzer began writing his two-volume critique of Western civilisation in 1915, during his first visit to Gabon. It was interrupted by his incarceration as a war prisoner in 1917 in Garaison in France. He safeguarded his writings with Mr Ford, an American missionary friend in Gabon. His thoughts about the degradation of Western thought deepened during his imprisonment. After his return to Africa, he was able to resume his writings on the collapse of Western spiritual values. I therefore contend that the culturally liminal context of Africa is vital in understanding Schweitzer's situatedness as an attesting subject (Schweitzer 1956a:193–204).

Schweitzer recounts in his autobiography, *My life and thought*, his first mystical experience of reverence for life whilst on the Ogooué River, sharing meals with his voyage companions and surrounded by the jungle (the plethora of wills to live). Via, I argue, an articulation process akin to Ricoeur's concept of

attestation, Schweitzer raises his reflection on the processes of nature to the level of compassion, which he expresses as ethical world- and life-affirmation (Schweitzer 1956a).

There are resonances here with Ricoeur's concept of *ipse*-identity, where identity draws the otherness that surrounds it into its own identity. The complex attesting identity speaks to the fluid immediacy of experience in combination with a more fixed sense of identity. Reflecting on Descartes' *Cogito, ergo sum*, Schweitzer (Schweitzer 1955:186) concludes that such 'thought is artificial and disconnected from human beings' relation to themselves and to the universe. Schweitzer argues against Descartes in that 'to think is to think something' (Schweitzer 1956a:186). Schweitzer asserts that (Schweitzer 1956a):

it is as will-to-live in the midst of other wills-to-live that man conceives himself [*sic*] during every moment that he spends in meditating on himself and the world around of. (p. 186)

The process of turning experience into a life-view overlaps with Ricoeur's idea of attestation, which is a personal account of the reflection of life's actual experience in its simultaneous fragility and assertiveness. To this end, Schweitzer observes in *My life and thought* (1956a):

The world-view of reverence for life follows from taking the world as it is. And the world means the horrible in the glorious, the meaningless in the full meaning, the sorrowful in the joyful. However it is looked at it remains to many a riddle... reverence for life brings us into a spiritual relation with the world which is independent of all knowledge of the

universe ... In the disposition to reverence for life we possess a life-view founded on itself, in which there stands, firm and ready for us, the ethical world-view we are in search of. (p. 235)

■ Schweitzer's thought after 1915

Schweitzer lived in Lambaréné for many years after 1915. By 1949 he was 74 years old and his health had begun to deteriorate. He spent time recuperating in the Black Forest. In his later life he travelled between the United States, Europe and Africa. Schweitzer's later writings call for a return to the humanitarianism that could rescue Western thought from the religious superstition of the Middle Ages and the humanism that was lost in the modern age when the ethics of humanism could not find purchase in the impulse towards scientific development. Schweitzer's Nobel Peace Prize commemorative speech explains how scientific discoveries which harness nature's power are soon put to the task of killing at a distance – separating the victor from the vanquished so that no lasting peace accord is necessary: the destruction of cities and large populations of people by war at a distance enable the view that wars are not ended due to violation of life, but rather that power alliances are maintained (Schweitzer 1954a:12). Schweitzer, along with his friend Albert Einstein, wrote to world leaders, including D.D. Eisenhower and J.F. Kennedy, to plead with them to desist from experimentations with atomic and hydrogen bombs and warning of the dangers of their use to resolve international

crises such as the Cuban nuclear crisis (AISL n.d.:n.p.). Schweitzer writes on the anniversary of his Nobel Prize acceptance that peace requires respect for the dignity of people's lives, cultural and ancestral homes and the maintenance of the integrity of natural life. The significance of his concept of reverence for life becomes most apparent in his writing in favour of peace and against abusive world powers bent on oppression and world control (Schweitzer 1954a:9). Reverence for life becomes an ethical statement against imperialism and for compassion for all of life. Schweitzer follows his inwardly discovered humanitarianism and criticises the Lasting Peace proposed by Kant. Kant stipulated a peace maintained by international rules in his essay on 'Perpetual peace' (Schweitzer 1954a:17), such as in the framework for the League of Nations and the United Nations (Schweitzer 1954a:15). Schweitzer does not criticise the attempts to establish world peace by such organisations, but he calls for a change of heart amongst world leaders to consider the safety of the planet when deciding on global threatening weaponry. His approach to world peace is therefore based on a common recognition of the human spirit and a return to humanitarian values – the cornerstone of reverence for life (Schweitzer 1954a:15). I would propose that such globally inclusive thinking was significantly influenced by his African experiences, where he witnessed the devastation of colonialism and the dominance of Western values aimed at wealth accumulation (Schweitzer 1955:222–223).

Reading Schweitzer at the hand of Ricoeur's concept of attestation and the *idem-ipse* identity dynamic reveals that his unique concept of reverence for life derives from his life experience of studying European philosophy, culture and science, coupled with his first-hand experience of Africa. In intellectual studies he developed the groundwork for a critique of Western thought. It is significant that he only formulated that critique in the midst of a first-hand experience of Africa and the exploitative processes of colonisation (Schweitzer 1955:222–228). Attestation, therefore, must take into account the fluidity of the *ipse-idem* dynamic in actual interactions with other humans and nature wherein a fixed sense of self interacts with a more fluid sense of self, which incorporates the other into its identity. It is also noteworthy in his later writings that the persistence of racial prejudicial categories in his writing, 'all men, even the half-civilised, even the savages ...' (Schweitzer 1954a:18), reveals the incomplete project of realising reverence for life his thinking.

In his later writings on peace and in opposition to atom bomb testing, Schweitzer can be seen to be culminating his life's work to 'search for the knowledge and convictions to which we must refer the will to civilization and the power to realize' (Schweitzer 1956a:176). His philosophy is, therefore, extreme in two regards: first, it calls for a radical shift in values from those externally-based thought systems that are imposed on individuals towards those developed from the immediacy of experience of the individual and grounded in universal compassion and

humanitarian values. Second, Schweitzer's philosophy emerges as a critique of Western thought, grounded in geographical regions distinct from the influence of dominant, materialistically fashioned philosophical narratives of the day. Indeed, Schweitzer argues for world peace based, not on abstract concepts, but rather on the shared immediate experience of the will to live.

In my view, Schweitzer was mostly successful in integrating his philosophy of reverence for life into his life's work and writing. He left his hospital in Lambaréné as a legacy and his work was recognised by the Nobel Prize committee, who awarded him the Peace Prize in 1952. In entering into the global fight against nuclear testing he was able to translate his philosophy into global relevance, although still unable to expunge colonial perceptions of race.

■ Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that a close reading of Schweitzer's biographical writings is critical to discerning the roots of his concept of reverence for life. Whilst framed in philosophical discourse, reverence for life is primarily a spiritual idea for Schweitzer (Schweitzer 1988:36). His approach is academic in that he sifts through traditions of ideas, seeking to set them in contextual frames of reference. Yet the sub-text in his writings is personal and spiritual in that he seeks to establish a truly ethical and spiritual relationship with the world (Feschotte 1955:130).

In this chapter, I have shown that this sub-text is clearly recognisable in his autobiographical writings. Crucially, I have proposed that Schweitzer's autobiographical writings show the significance of the role his African experience had in formulating his concept of reverence for life, an idea which has not been fully appreciated to this point. I advocate that Africa afforded him distance from his European context and allowed him to reach the immediacy of experience he sought. The distance from Enlightenment culture also helped to deepen his criticism of Western thought and develop his profound compassion for all humanity, indeed all life. This intensified affection for life came to the fore in his later life in his public addresses on the threats to world peace. In spite of Schweitzer's at times colonial mindset, which is justly criticised for its paternalism, his autobiographical writings detail the development of his thought and his African experience to offer unique and foundational insights into his central ideas, such as reverence for life.

■ Chapter 5: Summary

In this chapter, I demonstrate that Schweitzer's autobiographical writings provide a crucial lens through which to view the formation of his elemental philosophy which forms the basis for his notion of reverence for life. I will also turn to his political-ethical writings in the latter part of his life which focused on the anti-nuclear weapons campaign. Schweitzer's ideas reached

their fruition when he left Europe. His departure for Africa was in part motivated by his dissatisfaction with the presentation of Enlightenment concepts in both cultural and religious spheres. He felt that this problematic view of civilisation would lead to a repression of otherness and to a large-scale disrespect for life which, in many ways, presaged World War 1. He left Europe for Africa in 1913 in order to get away from the dominant narratives that informed what he called ‘world views’ in Europe and to explore ways to make thought more meaningful to the individual and to lived experience. His autobiographical writing reveals that his first profound experience of reverence for life occurred on a barge sailing down the Ogooué River in Gabon. My chapter explores the integration of this experience into his philosophical and ethical writings.

Part 3

**Albert Schweitzer as New
Testament Scholar**

Albert Schweitzer and the study of the New Testament: his legacies in African Biblical Interpretation

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■ Introduction

Although he wrote a number of books on the New Testament,⁴⁴ Albert Schweitzer is greatly remembered in New Testament studies

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44. Other books by Schweitzer on New Testament studies are *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God* (1901), *The Psychiatric Study of Jesus: Exposition and Criticism* (1911), *Paul and His Interpreters, A Critical History* (1912).

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for his 1906 publication, *The Quest of the historical Jesus*.⁴⁵ Web searches on Albert Schweitzer and the New Testament therefore often produce results on the quest of the historical Jesus. As D. Hawkin (2011) has noted, it is this publication compared to others that has had a major impact in New Testament studies worldwide. In it, Schweitzer identified a 'hermeneutical gap' between the Jesus of the Gospels and the reconstructed Jesus of the 20th century, the time when Schweitzer published his book. Schweitzer would describe Jesus as 'a stranger to our time'. He dealt with the subject that had preoccupied scholars of his and preceding generations. Living in a world dominated by rationalism, these scholars attempted to reconstruct the Jesus of history noting that the Jesus of faith seems to have been dressed differently from the historical Jesus. Schweitzer paid attention to the works of Herman Samuel Reimarus, David Friedrich Strauss and Johannes Weiss before he attempted his own reconstruction of the historical Jesus. From the works produced before him, Schweitzer concluded that the task was a failure. He stressed (Schweitzer 1954):

... each successive epoch of theology found its own thoughts in Jesus; that was, indeed, the only way in which it could make Him live. But it was not only each epoch that found its reflection in Jesus; each individual created Him in accordance with his own character. There is no historical task which so reveals a man's true self as the writing of a Life of Jesus. No vital force comes into the figure unless a man breathes into it all the hate or all the love of which he is capable. The stronger the love, or the stronger the hate, the more life-like is the figure which is produced. They were eager

45. So popular is the book that Dawes (1999:186) makes the following explanation when presenting the theology of Schweitzer, 'The reader may be surprised that the following extract does not come from Schweitzer's most famous work', *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*.

to picture Him as truly and purely human, to strip from Him the robes of splendour with which He had been apparelled, and clothe Him once more with the coarse garments in which He had walked in Galilee. (p. 5)

Through this publication, Schweitzer raised a number of issues that would prove very important for New Testament interpretation. We can make three important observations from the issues that he raised. First, is the existence of the hermeneutical gap between the time of Jesus and the times of the modern readers and users of the Bible. Second, but related to the first, is the observation that in trying to reconstruct the historical Jesus, scholars wrote their own stories.⁴⁶ Third, with his observations and arguments, Schweitzer proved that rationalism's objective of trying to present an objective picture of Jesus and early Christianity was impossible, thereby opening new ways of interpreting the life of Jesus. This observation led to the end of liberal theology. As a result, Hawkin (2011) is correct that Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* opened up new, creative possibilities for the interpretation of the New Testament. In this chapter, I pay particular attention to Schweitzer's influence on New Testament interpretation in light of the first observation that there is a hermeneutical gap between the time of Jesus and the contemporary times. Closing the hermeneutical gap that Schweitzer identified has methodological and/or hermeneutical implications. Schweitzer's generation did their scholarship with limited

46. As recent as 1992, an Australian scholar (Thiering) argued that Jesus was married twice and fathered three children. Interestingly, Thiering herself was married twice and had three children, experiences that probably influenced her reconstruction of Jesus' life.

methodologies. Today, the study of Jesus and the New Testament in general is guided by several methodologies. I argue that Schweitzer made a contribution in opening up several methodologies for studying the New Testament and the Bible in general. As D. Hawkin (2011) correctly notes:

... although the full flowering of Biblical methodology is relatively recent, the seeds for such flowering were sown over a century ago by a man whose own study of the New Testament was quite limited in terms of method. That man was Albert Schweitzer. (p. 303)

This is because almost all biblical methodologies attempt to close the hermeneutical gap originally articulated by Schweitzer. All methodologies attempt to show what the present Christian communities can learn from Jesus and the early Christian community. Amongst these many methodologies is African Biblical Interpretation (ABI). The birth of this method can be traced back to the past 30 to 40 years (Holter 2000; Ukpung 2000; West 2000). Some prefer to call it African Biblical Hermeneutics (ABH).⁴⁷ I am not interested here in the appropriateness, or not, of each rendering but in how the practitioners of this methodology, whatever name they give it, deal with the observations made by Albert Schweitzer in his original 1906 publication, *The Quest of the historical Jesus*.

Specifically, the paper attempts to answer the question: How does ABI address the hermeneutical gap and to what extent is its practice a legacy of Schweitzer? It is in answering this question

47. For example, Nyiawung (2013).

that we can identify the legacies of Albert Schweitzer in African Biblical Interpretation. To answer this question, I divide the paper into four sections. In the first section I discuss biblical interpretation in general and how it deals with the hermeneutical gap to direct Christian practice. What role should biblical interpretation have in directing Christian practice? Schweitzer provides us with the right lenses for discussing biblical interpretation and Christian practice in his identification of the hermeneutical gap. In the second section, I discuss how Schweitzer himself addressed the hermeneutical gap. Having established Schweitzer's position, I will then move on to discuss how ABI has addressed the same gap for Christian practice and to what extent the practice compares with Schweitzer's approach. I do this in sections three and four. Section three defines and provides a brief history of ABI, whilst section four then considers how ABI addresses the hermeneutical gap, in the process identifying Schweitzer's legacy in African Biblical Interpretation.

■ **Biblical interpretation and the hermeneutical gap**

The Bible remains the foundation document of the Christian church, having a great influence in its beliefs and practices. However, for the church to appropriate the message of the Bible, there is need to interpret its message because the modern users of the Bible are separated from the original audience of the biblical texts by a vast time, cultural, linguistic, historical

and even theological gap. D. Morgan and J. Barton (1988:1) define interpretation as, ‘an intermediary task performed by rational human beings to make human communication possible in difficult cases’. They (Morgan & Barton 1988:2) go further to note that interpretation is often reserved for difficult cases of communication where some form of intermediary activity is necessary. The hermeneutical gap identified by Albert Schweitzer in the case of the historical Jesus indeed makes communication of the message of Jesus today difficult and therefore calls for an intermediary. This is true of all the messages of the Bible as it contains written texts from the distant past. The cultural, historical and linguistic gap between biblical time and contemporary times makes the risks of misunderstanding even greater. We do not need to overemphasise the fact that there have been extensive cultural changes (in language, custom, social organisation, education, patterns of family relationships, music, art, entertainment) since the times of Jesus, let alone of Abraham and other OT characters.

Biblical interpretation, therefore, seeks to close this gap. This is done in different ways. Morgan and Barton (1988:6) mention one such approach when they say, ‘For written texts, interpreters seek authorial intention’. This is an approach that dominated biblical interpretation from the period of the Enlightenment until the late 1960s, early 1970s.⁴⁸ It is an approach that was

48. Seeds of change had, however, begun to be sown in the 1940s with the advent of New Criticism (Randolph Tate 2008:2).

influenced by the rationalist spirit of the day, a spirit that influenced Albert Schweitzer's predecessors and contemporaries. As Morgan and Barton (1988:9) continue to say, the aim of biblical interpretation then was 'to understand and write history'. The historian was to set the human record contained in the scriptures straight, accurately, illuminately and objectively. With the prominence of the historical critical method, biblical interpretation actually endeavoured to write history, and it can be argued that no attempt was made to close the hermeneutical gap. This will become more apparent when we consider the work of Albert Schweitzer below.

The interpretation of the Bible to seek authorial intent was emphasised by the global north (European and North American biblical scholarship). For this scholarship, the task of a biblical scholar was simply to say what the Bible means with the task of deciding how to use the Bible today (closing the hermeneutical gap) left to the theologian. Biblical scholarship was to be guided by non-religious aims but by historical reconstruction and literary appreciation. It was underlined that all this was to be done objectively. Thus, Maretha M. Jacobs (1999) speaks of New Testament scholars (and this is true of biblical scholars in general) saying their work would probably seldom have endings or, if they happen to have endings, they have 'open' endings. She says;

New Testament scholars, especially those with an historical approach, usually do not spell out the theological implications of what they do, say

and suggest. It is left to those who read and hear what they have to say to make sense of the results of their research. The most obvious reason for this is that New Testament scholars do not regard it as part of their job to spell out the implications of their work. Much of the work done in the field does not lend itself to this. Their work is, more-over, of such a nature and so specialized that it is hardly of any relevance to people outside the field. To spell out the implications of their work, some would add, is not only not part of their job, but would also be a violation of the boundaries of historical research. (p. 103)

This approach surely left the hermeneutical gap unclosed by the work of biblical scholars. It is for this reason that for almost two centuries there was warfare between traditional Christianity and modern Western rationalism that influenced biblical interpretation (Morgan & Barton 1988:21). Schweitzer would call for a different approach, a call which was, however, heeded later.

■ Schweitzer and the hermeneutical gap

Schweitzer was the first NT (biblical) scholar to challenge the claim for objectivity in biblical interpretation. He observed this in the project of the quest of the historical Jesus when he concluded that each writer was producing a Jesus after their own image. He therefore noted that although the aim of biblical interpretation (in his case, the reconstruction of the historical Jesus) is to do so objectively, the subjectivity of the historian is operative in various ways. Having observed this, Schweitzer's interpretation of the Bible mainly aimed to close the hermeneutical gap. As Dawes (1999:204) says, Schweitzer opened the door to a contemporary reappropriation

of the message of Jesus by distinguishing between Jesus' 'religion of love' and the 'world view' in which that message was expressed. In interpreting the message of Jesus, Schweitzer argued that the obligation of modern believers is to separate that message from the world view in which it is clothed, so that they can reclothe it in the garb of modern ideas. Schweitzer actually called for a paradigm shift in the way biblical interpretation was done by his contemporaries. He insisted, 'we now need to boldly admit that religious truth varies from age to age, at least with regard to its outward form' (Dawes 1999:204). The question Schweitzer wanted to address was what the eschatological Jesus, who lives expecting the end of the world and a supernatural kingdom of God, can be to us (Dawes 1999:205). He, 'sought to restore the otherness of the Jesus of the Gospels, to distinguish sharply between Jesus' first-century Jewish context and that of nineteenth-century German theology' (Gathercole 2000:266). It can therefore be argued that Schweitzer's interpretation sought to close the hermeneutical gap by interpreting the first century message of Jesus for 20th century Germany. He felt that the regeneration of the German people could not take place on the basis of historical error: that would merely result in violence to both religion and history.

Schweitzer also made another important argument that should guide biblical interpretation for the closure of the hermeneutical gap. He said the ideal thing would be that Jesus should have preached religious truth in a form independent of any connection with any particular period (Dawes 1999:207).

This way, succeeding generations would simply take over and easily apply the message. But Jesus did not do that. How then should we use his message today? Schweitzer's solution, as we have already noted, was that we therefore need to reclothe the message dressed in a particular world view so that it fits into our modern world view.

He said (Dawes 1999):

We of today not, like those who were able to hear the preaching of Jesus, expect to see a kingdom of God realizing itself in natural events. Our conviction is that it can only come into existence by the power of the spirit of Jesus working in our hearts and in the world. (p. 207)

Schweitzer then continued to identify love as the hallmark of Jesus' teaching. According to him, Jesus' moral authority resided in the quality of his teaching and religious personality rather than in the unacceptable orthodox suggestion that he was God incarnate (MacGrath 2001:387). Thus Hawkin (2011:301) describes Schweitzer as a devout Christian with a passionate allegiance to Jesus. He proceeds to describe Schweitzer as follows (Hawkin 2011):

He also believed that the will was primary. That is, his faith was voluntaristic. This explains why, when he could have had a career in academia, he chose to go to Lambaréné in Gabon to establish a hospital there. He thought that Christians were called to transform the world – which was essentially hostile – into a world where love prevailed. For Schweitzer, a metaphysical agnostic who, in the tradition of Kant, saw religion primarily in terms of ethics and the will, Jesus was a great heroic figure who gave complete expression to what it meant to be religious. (p. 301)

Schweitzer's dealing with the hermeneutical gap called for a distinction between exegesis and hermeneutics.⁴⁹ Thus, after Schweitzer, exegesis, the drawing out of the meaning of Biblical texts, is seen more clearly as a branch of the history of ideas. Hawkin (2011) elucidates on this and it is important to quote him at length:

Exegesis itself cannot adequately bridge the gap between then and now. It can contextualize the message of Jesus and thus we can recapture what it meant for the people of the time. But to bring that meaning into the present requires more than exegesis. It requires hermeneutical creativity. That is, we must transpose the message of Jesus into categories that are meaningful to the present. Before Schweitzer it was assumed that exegesis was hermeneutics. It was assumed that once we had recovered the original meaning of the Biblical text its message would have a clear meaning for us. But Schweitzer showed that the world which Jesus inhabited was not like our world, and Jesus' apocalyptic message was not readily appropriated by people in the modern world. In so doing Schweitzer set Biblical studies on a new course, one in which, in the famous designation of Krister Stendahl, it was acknowledged that what a text meant should be distinguished from what it means. (p. 301)

Thus, guided by this methodology, Schweitzer interpreted the original context of Jesus' message as apocalyptic eschatology. But from this message he drew meaning for his age in what he called, 'a will to will understanding of Jesus' (Weaver 1999:41). Explaining the 'will to will understanding of Jesus', Weaver (1999:41) says, 'There was, for Schweitzer, a kind of automatic translation of Jesus' word to us, a bridging of the hermeneutical gap that seems

49. This distinction is discussed at length by, for example, Randolph Tate (2008:1-4).

to occur somewhat mystically'. Thus, for Schweitzer, the hermeneutical gap between Jesus and us can only be closed through our ethics. He would therefore consider Christianity as a fellowship of all those humans whose wills are united to the will of Jesus. Using contemporary academic parlance, Schweitzer can be described as a socially engaged New Testament (biblical) scholar.⁵⁰ I see continuity between Schweitzer's dealings with the hermeneutical gap and African biblical interpretation, as I discuss further below. But first, a word on ABI and its history.

■ Defining and historicising ABI

Although the history of ABI has received considerable attention by scholars (Nyiauwung 2013; Ukpogon 2000; Van Eck 2006), it still needs to continue being told. This history should be understood in the light of global reactions to the historical critical method dominated by white middle class biblical scholars, especially from the West. In critique of this approach, C.B. Anderson (2009) writes:

Now, however, there is a sense that the few cannot arrogate to themselves the power to speak for all of humanity – and for God. The particularity of one small segment of humanity – the privileged white, Western, heterosexual male – can no longer masquerade as representing the diversity and fullness of God's creation. Through the tidal wave of

50. Socially engaged scholarship entails scholarship that makes the scholar an activist. J. L. Cox (2005:23) describes it as the way a religious (in this case, biblical) scholar relates to the life-threatening situations that religious communities may be perpetrating or be victimized by.

publications for ‘the Other’ – those who are different by virtue of race/ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and hemisphere – God is indeed ‘troubling the waters’. (p. 28)

In the above citation, Anderson speaks for all the formerly marginalised groups and methodologies. In the case of ABI, that history goes back to the 1970s when, following the independence of many African states, an attempt was made to read the Bible for the African context. Although many of the African biblical scholars had been trained in the West and specialised in teaching the Western biblical interpretation, these scholars began realising the emptiness of their teaching and research as long as it did not speak to the context of their people. It was clear to them that the hermeneutical gap remained glaring. From an African point of view, ‘traditional’ exegetical approaches have seemed abstract because they do not appear to address the African people in their very context (Nyirawung 2013:2).

Globally, ABI falls within the 1990s attempt to debate issues of culture, power and identity in biblical interpretation. R. S. Sugirtharajah’s edited volume, *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (1991) is one amongst many publications that introduced ‘other ways of reading the Bible’⁵¹ amongst which African Biblical Interpretation falls. A number of African biblical scholars contributed articles in this volume. All these publications emphasised social location as a major

51. *Other ways of reading: African women and the Bible* is a title of a book edited by Musa W. Dube (2001).

factor in biblical interpretation. As Barton and Morgan (1988:9) said, '[b]ut interpreters are never mindless servants of the text ... They are human agents with their own aims, interests and rights'. In the same vein, Carey (2013:4) states these observations and developments, 'set the path for an outburst of publications related to global, liberationist, postcolonial, minority, feminist, womanist and queer interpretation that has continued for decades'.

ABI should also be understood in the light of ideological decolonisation in all academic disciplines in Africa. For long, due to the effects of colonisation, knowledge has been defined by the West. Thus E. Chitando (n.d.) says:

... almost all disciplines in universities have been dominated by ideologies, perspectives, interests and approaches from the global North. What has been deemed 'standard scholarship' has invariably consisted of rehashing formulae developed in western contexts. African scholars (and other scholars in the global South) in various disciplines, including literature, history, philosophy and others, have challenged this hegemony of western scholars in academia. (n.p.)

The same has happened with ABI. It has questioned the hegemony of the historical critical method in biblical interpretation. But how has it dealt with the hermeneutical gap?

■ ABI and the hermeneutical gap

Although it came several decades after Schweitzer's observation of the subjectivity of biblical interpretation and therefore the need for

contextual relevance, ABI in its dealing with the hermeneutical gap follows in the footsteps of Albert Schweitzer. ABI is typically contextual, taking seriously the acceptance of Christianity in Africa. ABI therefore focuses on *the context of the audience*, making use of the results from other methods of exegesis and applying them to the realities of the African context (Nyiauwung & Van Eck 2013 3). Like Schweitzer, African scholars have grappled with an African response to the question of Jesus' identity: 'Who do you say I am' (Lk 9:20) (Appiah-Kubi 1997; Nyiauwung 2010; Stinton 2004).

ABI takes seriously the post-structuralist argument that the reader is the king. It rejects the view that the meaning of a text is centred on the figure of the author and therefore the need to interpret texts in terms of authorial circumstance and intention. It also rejects the 1920s and 1930s 'New Criticism' in which authorial intention was bracketed as unknowable, and the text seen as the only source of meaning (Longhurst 2008:745). ABI, as also understood by Schweitzer, proposes that the message of the Bible has to be interpreted for application in contemporary communities. In this process, world views become very important. Indeed, hermeneutics concerns world views (Van Eck 2006:692). As Du Toit (1998:378) says, 'The way we try to find meaning in our lives, it concerns our understanding of God, our relationships with other humans, it concerns our present difficulties and challenges'. ABI thus takes the context of the African into account in its interpretation of the Bible. Jesus, for example, has been understood as ancestor

(Kabasele 1997:116), king (Pobee 1979:95), brother (Kabasele 1997b:116) or friend (Stinton 2004:188).

The ABI Jesus is sufficiently connected to Christian faith and practice, hence the emphasis on closing the hermeneutical gap in biblical interpretation. The interest of scholars involved in African biblical studies has been that of contextualisation, characterised by the awareness of the need to relate the results of biblical findings to issues of politics, economy, social justice and the environmental concerns of the African society. Other challenges that Africa faces, such as HIV and AIDS, poverty, ethnic conflicts, gender-based violence have been subjects of biblical interpretation. ABI is, therefore, socially engaged scholarship. Like Schweitzer, who interpreted Jesus for the transformation of the Germany society of the 20th century, ABI's approach aims to explain how Jesus is, and can be, involved in the process of the transformation of Africa; 'transforming the meaning of Africa as a "dark continent" to a new Africa which has become an important and unavoidable source for theological reflection in the world' (Nyiauwung 2013:9).

African biblical scholars interpret the Bible in contexts where the Bible has social and religious authority over many people. Their interpretation therefore often affects the actual lived experiences of their people. ABI scholars therefore do not have the luxury of doing scholarship just for its sake. They interpret the text in contexts where people are hungry and need food, where people are ill and need healing, where people are thirsty

and need a drink, etc. Thus, in filling the hermeneutical gap, they have had to interpret the Bible with these realities in mind. L. Alonso Schockel (cited by Sugitharajah 1991) succinctly captures the idea that drives ABI scholarship:

People ask us for bread and we offer them a handful of theories about each verse of John 6. They ask questions about God and we offer them three theories about the literary form of one Psalm. They thirst for justice and we offer the discussions about the root word *sedaqa* (justice in Hebrew). I am examining my conscience out loud, and the reply I hear is: the one must be done without neglecting the other. (p. 7)

ABI is therefore guided by the agendas of both the scholars and their envisaged reading communities. This is the reality experienced by African scholars of the Bible. They live in contexts of poverty, disease, conflict, injustice and so on. It is only natural then that their work, if it is to be relevant, has to address these issues. Like Schweitzer, most scholars of ABI are Christians and therefore they are socially engaged scholars. No wonder the works of African biblical scholars such as Gerald West of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Musa Dube of the University of Botswana, Madipoane Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele) of the University of South Africa, David Tuesday Adamo of the Delta State University in Nigeria, just to mention a few, have engaged biblical interpretation to address the struggles of their people. ABI scholars do not, therefore, experience the struggle of which scholars such as G. Fee and D. Stuart (2003) had in mind:

who struggle between the concern of the scholar with what the text *meant*; and the concern of the layperson with what it *means*. Most of

them write from the point of view of the believing scholar who insists that we must have both. (n.p.)

This engaged scholarship, however, is not new in the history of biblical interpretation. It is a foundation that Schweitzer had laid and as M.A. Tolbert (2013) observes:

even the positivist historical critics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were often deeply motivated by the desire to reform contemporary faith and practice by revealing the pure moment of revelation in the historical Jesus. (p. 25)

Perhaps the difference with ABI is that it does not hide behind the search for objectivity as it clearly declares its interests and objectives. Schweitzer and other historical Jesus questers dealt with the problem of Jesus and the Kingdom of God. Is the kingdom present or future? This is a topic that scholars like R. Bultmann also addressed. ABI seems to lean towards the view that the Kingdom of God is realisable here and now through acts of love and charity, a position that Schweitzer advocated for both in his writings and in his life and work. It can therefore be concluded that ABI follows in the footsteps of Schweitzer in its interpretation of the New Testament and indeed the whole Bible. Thanks to Albert Schweitzer's questioning of objectivity in biblical interpretation, ABI rightfully claims a place in the discipline of biblical methodology today.

■ Conclusion

ABI, and indeed other ways of reading the Bible, has been accused of lacking objectivity as they clearly declare the

agendas of the interpreters of biblical texts. This paper has shown that the work of Albert Schweitzer on the quest of the historical Jesus shows that, in trying to close the hermeneutical gap, we cannot avoid putting in our agendas. Biblical interpretation is meant to illuminate the texts of the Bible for their meaning, understanding and use by the interpreters and their communities. Thus Tolbert (2013) asks the questions:

want to avoid mentioning the commitments and passions that they, for the most part, know motivates their writing of biblical interpretations? Why is having an 'agenda', which we all have, or partial vision, which is simply part of our human condition, seen as a detriment to the acceptance of our writings as biblical scholars? (p. 26)

This chapter has shown that Schweitzer's legacy of bringing Jesus to the contemporary believing communities lives within ABI.

■ Chapter 6: Summary

Albert Schweitzer is well known in New Testament studies for his quest for the historical Jesus. This quest led him to the identification of a 'hermeneutical gap' between the Jesus of the Gospels and the Jesus of our own times. Schweitzer would describe Jesus as 'a stranger to our time'. This conclusion had serious implications for biblical hermeneutics: how do we relate what the Gospels say about Jesus to our practice of Christianity today? This is the question that Schweitzer posed to biblical interpretation. Whereas David J. Hawkin has looked

at the implications of Schweitzer's work on liberation theology and the practice of African Christianity, his work's implications for African academic biblical interpretation calls for attention. This paper attempts this. It considers how African biblical scholars have dealt with the 'hermeneutical gap' in the interpretation of the Bible for Christian practice in Africa. The paper concludes that African Biblical Interpretation follows closely in the footsteps of Schweitzer in the way it addresses the hermeneutical gap.

Albert Schweitzer and the historical Jesus: Reflecting on some misconceptions

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I have never found another human being, in whom goodness and the longing for beauty is so ideally united than in Albert Schweitzer.

- *Albert Einstein*

Couldn't theology be a luxurious undertaking, couldn't we be with it fleeing from the living God? Couldn't such a problematic theologian as Albert Schweitzer have chosen the better part by attempting to heal wounds, feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, providing a home to parentless children?⁵²

- *Karl Barth*

52. The German text from Barth's *Basler Abschiedsvorlesung* is as follows: 'Könnte Theologie nicht eine Luxusbeschäftigung, können wir mit ihr nicht auf der Flucht vor dem

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Jesus wanted freedom and true humanity for the whole world.

- Albert Schweitzer

■ Introduction

In 1906 Schweitzer published the first edition of his classic book *The quest for the historical Jesus*. This book has been reprinted many times (the latest English edition in 2001). The voluminous book of about 600 pages reports on 19th century historical Jesus research and is regarded in New Testament scholarship as almost a canon with certain passages frequently quoted. However, one wonders how many NT scholars have really read the book, as the same quotations appear again and again in the literature. In this contribution, I want to address some issues which I regard as misunderstandings of Schweitzer, or even by Schweitzer

.....
(footnote 52 Continues...)

lebendigen Gott begriffen sein? Könnte ein so problematischer Theologe wie Albert Schweitzer nicht ... das bessere Teil erwählt haben, und mit ihm die ersten Besten, die da und dort ohne alle theologische Besinnung versucht haben, Wunden zu heilen, Hungrige zu speisen, Durstige zu tränken, elternlosen Kindern die Heimat zu bereiten? (quoted in Grässer 1979:6). The significance of these remarks by Barth in later life is highlighted by what he wrote to his friend Eduard Thurneysen in the 1920's: *'Vor 8 Tagen habe ich unsern Zeitgenossen Albert Schweitzer hier in meinem Studierzimmer und in seinem Lambarenevortrag erlebt. Ich teilte ihm freundlich mit, das sei, saftige Werkgerechtigkeit, und er sei ein Mensch des 18. Jahrhunderts, und im Übrigen unterhielten und verständigten wir uns dann sehr gut. Es hat keinen Sinn, mit ihm zanken zu wollen. Er sieht auch sich selber relativ wie alles und alle, und dass man mitleidig sein soll, ist ja sicher wahr und auch für uns immer wieder zu bedenken. Ich muss ins Kolleg. Ich rede heute über die Schädlichkeit zeitloser Wahrheiten'* (quoted in Grässer 1979:5). To this accusation Schweitzer replied: *'Wenn ich es als meine Lebensaufgabe betrachte, die Sache der Kranken unter fernen Sternen zu verfechten, berufe ich mich auf die Barmherzigkeit, die Jesus und die Religion befehlen'*. (quoted in Grässer 1979:5)

himself, about the Jesus scholars he writes about. They pertain to the following:

Firstly, the misunderstanding that Schweitzer through his research history brought historical Jesus studies to a close for at least 50 years, because he had shown it to be impossible.

Secondly, the misunderstanding that Schweitzer has proven through his study that all historical Jesus research is invalid because every researcher only reads his own image of Jesus into his construction of the latter.

Thirdly, the uncritical assumption amongst many scholars that Schweitzer was correct in his analysis and evaluation of the 18th, 19th, and early 20th century scholars which he discussed.

Fourthly, going along with the first misconception, the assumption that Schweitzer had no construction of the historical Jesus of his own, or that the one he had was beyond criticism.

Fifthly, that Schweitzer, with his doctoral dissertation in medicine, has shown that any psychological understanding of Jesus or the Bible should be abandoned.

Sixthly, that the historical Jesus is confined or locked up in the first century and has no meaning for today.

In the most recent biography on Schweitzer, Oermann (2013:9–12) contends that the admiration which Schweitzer has received up to now has caused that biographies tend not to be critical of him. His work on the historical Jesus is therefore

hardly criticised, because that would be unfair to a man who devoted his life to being a doctor in Lambarene. According to Oermann, the time has come to give a more balanced view on Schweitzer in which even some shortcomings may be considered. This I will do with regard to his work on the historical Jesus. However, this in no way takes away my profound appreciation for his work on Jesus and his following of the latter. For Schweitzer, his life circled around Jesus of Nazareth, and to my mind, he himself earned the respect of the world because he had the courage not only to interpret the challenging message of Jesus in the latter's own world, but in an equivalent manner in the 20th century. Thereby he has revealed two things: firstly, that our world is in need of Jesus of Nazareth and his message, stripped of church dogma, and secondly, that one cannot have a high regard for Schweitzer without having a regard for the historical Jesus. The two go hand in hand.

Therefore, although dealing with misconceptions, my aim is to portray the Jesus image which Schweitzer had as positively as possible. I will therefore, as far as possible, formulate 'positive headings' in what follows.

■ On the (im)possibility of Jesus research

In his influential book on the historical Jesus, Gunther Bornkamm (1975) wrote the following dramatic words in 1956:

Nobody is in the position anymore to write a life of Jesus. This is the uncontended and surprising result of a search which for almost 200 years applied an extraordinary and in no way fruitless labour to recover and reconstruct the life of the historical Jesus, liberated from all paint over by dogma and doctrine. At the end of this quest for the historical Jesus stands the recognition of its own failure. Albert Schweitzer in his classic work, *The quest of the historical Jesus* ([1906] 2001), erected a monument for this quest, but also delivered the funeral oration. (p. 11)

This view of Bornkamm that Schweitzer, through his research history, brought historical Jesus studies to a halt for at least 50 years because he has shown it to be impossible, is to my mind a misunderstanding, entertained by many NT scholars, especially in Germany. It is probably based on some statements which Schweitzer made which, if read out of context, may lead to such a conclusion. For instance, in the last chapter of his classic book ([1906] 2001:478) he begins with the following statement: ‘There is nothing more negative than the result of the critical study of the historical Jesus’.

Schweitzer furthermore continues with the following often quoted remark, especially by NT scholars who would not want to take the trouble to study the historical Jesus (maybe because of the latter’s challenging consequences), or because they are satisfied with the ‘biblical Christ’ as spelt out by Martin Kähler (1964). According to Schweitzer ([1906] 2001):

The study of the Life of Jesus ... set out in quest for the historical Jesus, believing that when it had found him it could bring him straight to our time as a teacher and a saviour. It loosened the bands by which for

centuries he had been riveted to the stony rocks of ecclesiastical doctrine, and rejoiced to see life and movement coming into the figure once more ... But he did not stay; he passed by our time and returned to his own. What surprised and dismayed the theology of the last forty years was that, despite all forced and arbitrary interpretations, it could not keep him in our time, but had to let him go. (p. 478–479)

The above statement already suggests that Schweitzer did not discredit the study of the historical Jesus per se, but a certain kind of study. This becomes clearer if another, seemingly more radical, statement is considered ([1906] 2001):

The Jesus of Nazareth who came forward publicly as the Messiah, who preached the ethic of the kingdom of God, who founded the kingdom of heaven upon the earth, and died to give his work its final consecration, never existed. He is a figure designed by rationalism, endowed with life by liberalism, and clothed by modern [*read late 19th century-EHS*] theology in a historical garb. (p. 478)

Here and elsewhere it becomes clear that Schweitzer wants to oppose 19th century liberal theology (as represented by, amongst others, his own teacher H.J. Holtzmann (1863), who wanted to domesticate Jesus for the needs of contemporary culture (Theissen & Merz 2011:24). By applying his ethic within our political systems the world will naturally be improved and the kingdom of God will gradually be established here on earth. Schweitzer does not deny the positive ideals of this theology, but defends the real Jesus of history who, in accordance with contemporary Jewish apocalyptic views, denied the continued existence of this world, expecting the radical intervention of God to end everything and

then establishing the kingdom of God (Mk 9:1; Mt 10:32). According to him, we must be true to history and not change history for our own sake.

Furthermore, that Schweitzer made his own construction of the historical Jesus already in 1901 (Schweitzer [1901] 1929) testifies to the fact that he did not believe that every search or construction is impossible or invalid. Those scholars who indeed made such an interpretation, especially in Germany, indeed refrained from such study and some of them still do today, falsely thinking that they are following Schweitzer. But even so studies *did* appear in the first half of the 20th century (e.g. Bultmann 1926; Burney 1926; Manson 1934, 1937). In the second edition of his book, which he wrote whilst studying medicine, he reported on studies appearing from 1907 to 1912. In 1913 he went to Lambarene and worked on his book on the mysticism of Paul, which appeared in 1930 (by many regarded as his best book). Although he wrote a third forward to the 1950 edition of his Jesus book, he did not change much. Being occupied by his work as a doctor and the demands of his other studies on cultural philosophy and world religions, he remarked that he left it to others to write the *Leben Jesu Forschung* of the 20th century. Such a study (of the so-called 50 lost years) was undertaken by Weaver (1999). Theissen and Merz (2011:22–29), is therefore correct in distinguishing between five phases of the *Leben Jesu Forschung* instead of the traditional three (first, new and third quests).

As will be seen from other statements made by Schweitzer regarding the historical Jesus (side references in other works), it is clear that the historical Jesus (even after his research history) not only played a prominent role in his thinking and doing but, in fact, it played the central role.

■ Positive appropriation by the researcher or negatively creating Jesus in the own image

In stating the problem of Jesus research Schweitzer made the following remark ([1906] 2001):

But it was not only each epoch that found its reflection in Jesus; each individual created Jesus in accordance with his own character. There is no historical task which so reveals a man's true self as the writing of a life of Jesus. No vital force comes into the figure unless a man breathes into it all the hate or all the love of which he is capable. The stronger the love, or the stronger the hate, the more lifelike is the figure which is produced. (p. 6)

Probably, this statement of Schweitzer, taken on its own, led to the misconception that Schweitzer had proven through his study that all historical Jesus research is dubious and invalid because every researcher only reads his own image of Jesus into his construction. No wonder that the notion of the end, or *Scheitern* [failure] of Jesus research, was often put forward.

Again, Schweitzer never meant this. He merely underscores the fact that, in the research of anything or any aspect of history, there is no pure objectivity. And this should be especially kept

in mind when studying the historical Jesus, because of the special place he may occupy in the researcher's life. This reminds one of Renan's observation (1863) that, apart from the fact that the author should best reside in Palestine when writing his life of Jesus (as he was), a study of the historical Jesus is best made by a Christian who has lost his 'absolute' faith. Losing that faith, according to Renan, allows for more objectivity, and having been a believer allows for being able to understand Christianity from the inside ([1863] 1991:26).

Again, Schweitzer made his statement in order to expose the subjective liberal Jesus research of his day in which the historical first century Jesus is domesticated and accommodated to serve the needs of European culture at the turn of the previous century. Schweitzer never claimed that all Jesus research is invalid, and in his book, he would evaluate various studies differently. In fact, in the same paragraph as his misunderstood statement, Schweitzer alleged that Reimarus's (1788) and Strauss's [1935] (1972) hate of the 'supernatural nimbus surrounding Jesus' (which he shared) sharpened their historical insight. According to him, 'they advanced the subject more than all the others put together'. Schweitzer furthermore had a positive evaluation of the work of Wrede (1901), with whom he differed on some aspects (Schweitzer [1906] 2001:296–302), and the psychological study by Weidel (Schweitzer [1906] 2001:446–448), a student of Wrede to which I will return below. Judging Renan as being influenced too much by his 'sentimental

disposition', Schweitzer, to my mind, wrongfully discredited the former's work. Besides liberal researchers, he also exposed the subjective disposition of those wanting to diagnose Jesus as being mad (Schweitzer [1913] 1933), or those who denied that Jesus ever existed (see his lengthy discussion of especially Bruno Bauer and Drews (1910, see Schweitzer [1906]:124–142 and [1906]:422–427; for a recent discussion of the matter see Ehrmann 2012).

Interpreting Schweitzer in context, one can therefore conclude that creating Jesus in one's own image is always a danger, without denying that one, in any case, always carries oneself into any construction, the more so if one wants to appropriate Jesus in the end. To this fact even the existence of four gospels testifies, (as made clear by redaction criticism since the fifties, see Rohde 1969; Perrin 1970), and as the gospels should be historical critically scrutinized, so also the 'Lives of Jesus' being written. This very fact I hope to exemplify even in the case of Schweitzer himself.

■ Schweitzer's (flawed and) brilliant report on the quest of the historical Jesus

Schweitzer called the 19th century quest for the historical Jesus 'the greatest achievement of German theology'. In similar words, one can laud Schweitzer's grotesque report of this quest like Bornkamm ('monument', 1956:11), Perrin ('famous and

brilliant', 1970:3, Robinson ('what a research history!' in Schweitzer, [1906] 1984:7) and Borg ('masterful' in Schweitzer [1906] 2001:vii) did. And, indeed, it is a thoroughgoing critical discussion of the main representatives with not only Schweitzer's critical evaluation, but also ample extensive quotations which make an empathetic understanding of the Jesus biographers' often lengthy works possible for the present reader. No wonder, as Schweitzer reports in his autobiography (1931) how he was totally occupied and lost himself in the Strassburg library that contained all the works. No English translation can do justice to the profound German (often laden with metaphors) which Schweitzer artistically employed. Some helpful biographical detail for every author is given, and, in cases of outstanding figures such as David Friedrich Strauss and Ernest Renan, two bibliographies are provided of literature elicited by these authors (no less than 60 titles for Strauss and 85 for Renan, see Schweitzer [1906] 1983:632–639). Unfortunately, these bibliographies are omitted in the so-called 'first complete [*English*] edition' of 2001.

As it happens with all iconic figures, there is usually a reluctance to criticise them. Schweitzer's fame was so much enhanced by his philosophical studies (Schweitzer 1899, [1923] 1960, 1966), his over 800 page book on Bach and his masterful interpretation of the latter at the organ (Schweitzer 1912-1914), and, above all, his charitable work as a doctor in Lambarene (Schweitzer 1959) that ordinary epigonic mortals have been

reluctant to criticise his report of the quest for the historical Jesus. Grässer (1979), for one, provides a cursory overview of Schweitzer's book (88–114), and concludes that the significance of Schweitzer's research was that it indicated the importance of the basic historical questions regarding the sources and the religio-historical rootedness of Jesus (1979:114). For the rest, Grässer is more interested in Schweitzer's own 'theologischer Ort in der Geschichte der Jesusforschung' (126–139). In NT scholarship generally, as well as in biographies on Schweitzer, the uncritical assumption seems to be often made that Schweitzer was correct in his analysis and evaluation of the 18th and 19th century historical Jesus scholars (besides Bornkamm 1956:11; Grässer 1979; see Betz 1962:159–171; Dunn 2003; Grabs 1949:81–118; Lind 1955:147–160; Michel 1962:125–134; Müller 1962:146–158; Picht 1960:43–78; Theissen and Merz 2011; Werner 1962:135–145; Wright 1996:4–21).

However, there is some criticism that can be levelled and according to Oermann 50 years after Schweitzer's death it is perhaps the proper time to do so. This is done not to degrade Schweitzer, but to serve the cause which he himself wanted to serve: the authentic and accountable appropriation of the historical Jesus in today's world.

Firstly, it can be mentioned that Schweitzer, with some exceptions, mainly considered 'Lives of Jesus' written in the German world, ignoring English and American contributions.

In fact, it can be questioned if the search for the historical Jesus, even in the 19th century, can be typified as an exclusive German undertaking best to be done by a superior ‘German temperament’.⁵³

Secondly, his discussion of most of the authors revolves around his own interest, namely his own construction of the historical Jesus as a person who was mistaken in seeing himself as the Messiah who expected the imminent coming of God’s kingdom in terms of Jewish apocalyptic eschatology. Where Strauss ([1835] 1972) wanted to solve the historical problem of miracles by rejecting both the supernatural and rationalistic interpretations and opting for the mythical one, Schweitzer gives due attention but that is clearly not his main interest. His aim was to be as honest to history as possible (as he saw it) and in opposition to contemporary liberal theology to keep Jesus in the ‘coarse garbs’ in which he walked, pondered and taught in first century Galilee.

Thirdly, following from the previous observation, the result of Schweitzer’s own interest was that many other important

53. Schweitzer commences his study dramatically: ‘When, at some future day, our period of civilisation lies closed and completed before the eyes of later generations, German theology will stand out as a great, a unique phenomenon in the mental and spiritual life of our time. For only in the German temperament can there be found in the same perfection the living complex and conditions and factors – of philosophical thought, critical acumen, historical insight, and religious feeling – without which no deep theology is possible. And the greatest achievement of German theology is the critical investigation of the life of Jesus’ ([1906] 2001).

aspects of the historical Jesus, especially his teaching – although probably present in the work of the authors – was simply ignored by Schweitzer. Amongst others can be mentioned Jesus' mediation (flowing from a disposition of compassion) of the nearness of God in aphorisms, parables and common meals, the social acceptance of the marginalised, the acceptance of so-called sinners, the impure, the poor and the down trodden, as well as the healing of the sick and demon possessed. Jesus' teaching on forgiveness, humility, love for the enemy, non-violence and peace making also receives little attention in Schweitzer's classic. Further can be mentioned Jesus' conflict and resistance to Jewish and Roman oppressive authorities (cf. Horsely 2014:335–360; Schröter 2014:303). That these aspects receive attention in other Schweitzerian literature (e.g. sermons, essays and lectures) is hereby not denied (e.g. Schweitzer 1981).

Fourthly, a worthwhile endeavour is to read an author whom Schweitzer had discussed and then to judge whether one agrees with Schweitzer's evaluation. This I have done in the case of Ernest Renan (Scheffler 1999), whose book *La Vie de Jesus* ([1863]) I still regard as one of the best. Schweitzer is frustrated with Renan, not so much with regard to matters of content, but with what he regarded as sentimentalism. Although he grants that Renan's work was historical and gave to the Latin world 'in a single book the result of the whole process of German criticism' ([1906] 2001:159), he continues to criticise it harshly, despite further positive remarks. According to Schweitzer ([1906] 2001):

There is scarcely any other work on the subject which abounds so in lapses of taste – and that of the most distressing kind ... It is ‘Christian’ art in the worst sense of the term – the art of the waxed image. The gentle Jesus, the beautiful Mary, the fair Galileans who formed the retinue of the ‘amiable carpenter’ might have been taken over from the shop-window of an ecclesiastical art emporium in the Place St Sulpice. (p. 159–160)

Ironically Strauss, whom Schweitzer admired, was positively inclined to Renan’s work and called him ‘a kindred spirit and ally, shaking hands with him across the Rhine’ (Schweitzer [1906] 2001:167). To my mind, a valid criticism against Renan would have been that he used John’s gospel’s basic historical outline (which ironically is today again considered, Charlesworth 2010:3–46). Nevertheless, Renan’s attempt at the construction of Jesus’ life provides some glimpses on the life of Jesus which could be interpreted (or at least considered) as of sound historical value. In view of this, Schweitzer’s remark that the book’s weakness is that its author did not, as a child, read the New Testament in his mother tongue is unfortunate ([1906] 2001:167). But perhaps Schweitzer can be forgiven for this immature judgement because he made it himself when he was merely 30 years old.

■ Schweitzer’s own construction of Jesus and its challenge

Because Schweitzer was perceived as concluding with his research that constructing the historical Jesus is impossible,

sometimes the fact that Schweitzer indeed had his own peculiar view is overlooked. His own construction revolves around the issue whether Jesus expected the kingdom of God to break through in his own lifetime with himself being the Messiah and Son of Man (as in Dn 7) of this new kingdom. On the basis of a literal reading of the missionary discourse of Matthew 10, done whilst he was merely 19 years old, Schweitzer (in contrast to his teacher Holtzmann who regarded Mt 10 as a post-Easter literary construction – Schweitzer [1901] 1929:48–54) argued that Jesus indeed believed that the kingdom would appear as expressed by himself in Mt 10:23: ‘I tell you solemnly, you will not have gone the round of the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes’. However, Jesus was mistaken, because the disciples returned (Mk 6:30) without any of the predicted persecutions having taken place and without the kingdom appearing. According to Schweitzer, who found confirmation of his theory in the work of Johannes Weiss ([1892] 1971), Jesus was disappointed about this and decided to go to Jerusalem to force the kingdom to come by sacrificing his own life.

Schweitzer dramatically, and with great artistic rhetoric, summarised his position on a very human Jesus in his first edition of his *Leben Jesu*, another often quoted passage (quoted in Gunn 2003):

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 on 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 a spiritual ruler of mankind and to bend history to his purpose, is hanging upon it still. That is His victory and His reign. (p. 47)

To my mind, unfortunately (since it clearly reflects his view) Schweitzer, perhaps in reaction to the shock it elicited, removed this beautiful passage from later editions.

Although with this view Schweitzer succeeded to interpret Jesus within the context of first century Jewish apocalyptic expectation, and thereby countered an optimistic liberal theology by putting forward a Jesus radically opposing this world with its wrongs (which had pertinent political implications), he had to face the problem that his Jesus was not popular. For ‘who would follow or take as an example a failed eschatological prophet or apocalyptic fanatic?’ (Gunn 2003:47).

As far as the offence given by his view that Jesus had miscalculated his position is concerned, Schweitzer emphasised the humanity of Jesus by referring to Mark 10:18 (correctly transmitted in Lk 18:18 but euphemised in Mt 19:16–17): ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone’. For Schweitzer, Nicean Church doctrine on the divine nature of Christ had no place in assessing the historical Jesus. Although

he regarded Jesus as ‘eine übermenschliche Persönlichkeit aus einem Guss’, he regarded the historical Jesus’ ‘Unterordnung unter Gott’ (subjection to God) as paramount (‘ergreifend’, quoted in Brüllmann 1986:113–114).

According to Schweitzer, Jesus had a radical ‘interim’ ethic (as expressed in the Sermon on the Mount) which he could only proclaim in view of the imminent end of the world. Because there would be no long haul, hatred for the enemy, gathering of possessions, striving for high positions and harbouring resentment are senseless.⁵⁴ Therefore, this ethic could entail renouncing power positions, peace-making, love for the enemy, abstention from violence, renunciation of possessions by almsgiving and mutual human forgiveness and humility as well as compassionate action towards the marginalised and suffering humanity. Some scholars accepted Schweitzer’s theory on consequent eschatology, but because history proved that he had been mistaken, Jesus’ interim ethic is regarded as impractical and should be adapted for our evolutionary concept of history. This view Schweitzer never shared. On the contrary, he regarded Jesus’ radical ethic as valid and radically confronting our zones of comfort and degenerated world. This ethic inspired him, to the amazement and critique of friends and family, to devote his life in the service of humanity.

54. For a well-put present-day representation of this view, see Ehrmann (1999) who shares Schweitzer’s ‘apocalyptic’ perspective.

Borg (in Schweitzer [1906] 2001:ix) remarks that, although Schweitzer's claim that Jesus' message within an 'end-of-the-world-framework' became near consensus in mainstream scholarship, it has recently shown strong signs of weakening (see e.g. Schröter 2014:135). Today no serious NT scholar would pretend that Matthew 10 and the other large discourses in his gospel are not (although employing authentic material) post-Easter compilations (e.g. Allison 2001). Today both the perspectives regarding the text as expressing a narrated world and a narrating world of the author and his addressees (transparency) are widely recognised. Nor does it mean that if the ethic is *de-eschatologized* (as in Luke's Gospel) that it is less appealing and radical. In fact, Luke's Gospel can, precisely because of its *de-eschatologized* perspective, be regarded as the most ethicised gospel (Horn 1983; Scheffler 1993). The challenge of the notion that 'the kingdom of God is among you' (Lk 17:21) and that whenever suffering is ameliorated the kingdom appears (Mt 10:7–8; Lk 7:18–23; 11:20) can be just as challenging as Schweitzer's view, moreover excluding the possibility of regarding the ethic as 'unpractical' or only valid in an eschatological world.

■ The possibility of psychological research: the unique personality of Jesus

Before reflecting on Schweitzer's view on the relevance of the historical Jesus for today, his view on the possibility of employing psychology and psychiatry in studying the personality of the

historical Jesus demands our attention. On the basis of Schweitzer's repudiation in his 46 page medical doctoral dissertation of contemporary psychiatric evaluations that regarded Jesus as insane (Schweitzer [1913]1933), subsequent researchers (e.g. Bultmann 1926; see overview in Grässer 1979) came to the conclusion that psychology should not be employed when studying the historical Jesus.

This was never Schweitzer's intention. His debate was with those medical contemporaries who were not versed in historical criticism and who regarded Jesus as delusional on the basis of his belief in demons and his immanent apocalyptic expectation of the kingdom of God (a construction ironically made available to them by Schweitzer). Schweitzer argues that if Jesus lived in a society where such beliefs were held amongst many people, thus being normal to them, Jesus cannot be regarded as abnormal. According to him, his medical colleagues lacked textual and historical knowledge of first century Palestine. According to him, Jesus could only be delusional if that conclusion could be drawn on the basis of evidence of the contemporary framework.

As said, Schweitzer argued his case so convincingly that subsequent New Testament scholarship concluded that Jesus' psychology should be avoided and Jesus' psychobiography could not, and should not, be studied (explicitly expressed by e.g. Bultmann 1926). And, of course, there also existed the 'paranoic'

fear of being exposed by the ‘atheistic’ psychology of Sigmund Freud (as expressed in his book *Totem und Tabu* [1913] 1980; see also Scharfenberg 1971).

Corroborating Schweitzer, Donald Capps (2014), for one, who wrote a psychobiography of Jesus (1989; cf. also Van Os 2010) laments this situation and advocates the necessity of employing psychology besides sociological and anthropological approaches. That Schweitzer appreciated proper psychological approaches is clear from his lengthy quotation of Weidel (1908), which according to Schweitzer rightfully illustrates how the tremendous contradictions in Jesus’ character strive against one another, but are ‘nevertheless moulded by the superior might of his overwhelming force of will into a real harmony’. Whilst Schweitzer’s quoting of Weidel testifies to his positive view of the influence of the personality of Jesus up to our present time, and surely in his own life, I repeat (also for the sheer beauty of it) the quotation (using Montgomery’s translation, in Schweitzer [1906] 2001) regarding Jesus’ personality:

A master mind, of incomparable sovereign self-understanding, that is Jesus as he stands before us, the born ruler, whose strength of will makes all bend involuntarily before him, yet of childlike disposition and a friend of children, spreading the light of innocent joyousness when he appears. Of supreme piety in his attitude to his ancestral customs and law, at the same time he is the greatest revolutionary that world history has ever known. Capable of passionate wrath and a hard judge, he is a fiery fighter, yet a man full of gentleness and goodness, mild and indulgent, and a friend of sinners. He stood in the

midst of life, yet it remained strange to him; he participated innocently in its events, its joys and sorrows, its social round, yet he cut all bonds of possession, occupation, marriage, all that could fetter him to life, and loved solitude. Full of bitter irony and asperity when faced with people and their weaknesses, yet he was their saviour and redeemer. Of sharp, penetrating understanding, he was a match for all versed in scholarship and sophistry, beating them all at their own game and at the same time so modest and naïve by nature and with such a clear mode of expression that a child could understand him. He was clear, calm, decisive and purposeful in his actions, then again passionately excited, impulsive, as if 'beside himself', driven by some higher compulsion. Unapproachably proud, of kingly self-confidence, he was yet the companion of sinners. Of unparalleled independence and self-control, in the face of which all authority and all bonds of piety break down, at the same time he submitted himself unconditionally to God. King and beggar, hero and child, prophet and reformer, fighter and prince of peace, ruler and server, revolutionary and sage, man of action and poet, he was all these in one person. He could talk as a man is rarely able to talk, yet he loved to be silent. He was manliness personified, austere to the point of harshness, yet he could acquiesce, could give himself, sacrifice himself as only a woman can. He was entirely self-sufficient, and absolute individualist in his principles and his appearance, yet it was he who issued a call for a social fellowship which had to be realised. A quite unusual strength of will is the central force of his personality. Only a tremendous self-control could allow him to endure such a multiplicity or conflicting talents and forces within himself without damage to his personality, and make it possible for him to unite them all into complete effectiveness. The bearer of such an endless wealth of precious ideas which elevate mankind to higher things, of such a tremendous will, with the strength to master a world, must by inner necessity also reveal a higher consciousness of himself than ordinary people ... Jesus declared

himself to be the Messiah. In our language this means no more nor less than that he had taken himself to be the one to consummate world history and to be the absolute lord of all spirits, the one called upon to bring God's plans, as unfolded in history, to their fulfilment. That he was mistaken about when this would happen and believed this consummation to be near is unimportant. On the contrary, it is merely the obvious expression of the energy of his will and self-understanding, which dissolved all notion of time. Jesus has shifted religion from the sphere of the intellect and the sense to that of the will. This action, which, like all he said and did, has had such an effect upon world-history, directly reflects the nature of his personality. It is precisely because he interpreted religion in this way that it became for him not a mere eschatological hope for the future but an already present experience. It sounds paradoxical, but in the light of his character it is quite comprehensible that Jesus, in whom the eschatological hope blazed most intensely, in whom it became almost a person, subdued it with just this his own interpretation, raising religion from the sphere of speculation and hope to the higher level of immediate, active and passive experience. A man such as he could not sit back idly and yearn for the future consummation to take place. He compels it to come (p. 447)

■ Schweitzer's view on the meaning of the historical Jesus for today

The last misconception regarding Schweitzer and the historical Jesus is the notion that Schweitzer demonstrated that the historical Jesus is confined, or locked up, in the first century and has no meaning for today. This assumption is, amongst others, based on the following remarks of Schweitzer (quoted in Joy 1947):

In the very moment when we were coming nearer to the historical Jesus that men had ever come before and were already stretching our hands to draw him into our own time, we have been obliged to give up the attempt and acknowledge our failure ... And further we must be prepared to find that the historical knowledge of the personality of Jesus will not be a help, but perhaps even be an offense to religion. (p. 82)

Schweitzer explains by stating that (quoted in Joy 1947):

it is not Jesus as historically known, but Jesus as spiritually arisen within men, who is significant for our time and can help it. Not the historical Jesus, but the spirit which goes forth from him and in the spirits of men strives for new influence and rule, is that which overcomes the world. (p. 82)

As we have already noted with regard to other misconceptions based on only limited passages from Schweitzer's work, Schweitzer's real view can only be constructed if all his statements on a specific issue are considered in their contingent contexts. One can even say that Schweitzer, because of his desire to formulate sharply, sometimes contradicted himself. He definitely did believe that the historical Jesus has relevance for today as is perhaps most clear from the poetic (and often quoted) passage with which he concluded his famous book on Jesus research ([1906] 2001):

He comes to us as one unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, he came to those men who did not know who he was. He says the same words, 'Follow me!', and sets us to those tasks which he must fulfil in our time. He commands. And to those who hearken to him, whether wise or unwise, he will reveal himself in the peace, the labours, the conflicts and the suffering that they may experience in his fellowship, and as an ineffable mystery they will learn who he is(p. 487)

This passage clearly reflects the appeal which the historical Jesus has, and should have, on modern humans without domesticating and adapting him to our needs. Following Jesus in Schweitzer's case meant for him in the first place to establish a hospital in tropical Africa.

Furthermore, in the context of European culture it made him to develop, on a highly sophisticated philosophical level, the philosophy of 'reverence for life' (splendidly appraised by Botha 2015). He positioned this philosophy between the life resignation of Schopenhauer (see Russell 1961:725) and the harsh life affirmation of Nietzsche (see Russell 1961:731-734), and concluded that '[t]he ethic of Reverence for Life is the ethic of Love widened into universality. It is the ethic of Jesus, now recognised as a necessity of thought' (1931:270). According to Schweitzer (1966):

Christianity will become a living truth for subsequent generations when Christian thinkers would, in the spirit of Jesus, bring the faith in him to knowledge in the thoughts of the worldview of their time. (p. 82)

Although his book on Jesus research may make for difficult reading, Schweitzer maintained that 'to acknowledge and to grasp Jesus, need no learned making up of peoples' minds on their behalf (*Bevormundung*, quoted in Brüllmann 1986:115). Starting with the simple sayings of the Sermon on the Mount (e.g. the beatitudes and antitheses), he had no difficulty in preaching Jesus to the (at that stage) illiterate indigenous people of Lambarene. He explicitly stated that the 'difference between whites and blacks, educated and uneducated disappears when

we mutually debate the questions that concerns ourselves, the world and the Eternal' (quoted in Brüllmann 1986:8).

According to Schweitzer, Jesus means something to our world, 'because a great spiritual current emanated from him and also floods our time' (in Brüllmann 1986:114). Jesus did not only seek to reconcile justice and love, but communicated to humans that 'if they want to live in the spirit of God, they may only think and act in terms of love' (1986:114). According to Schweitzer, the gospel is, for him, true religion because Jesus was so human, understanding human suffering and human yearning so well, whereas everything else which usually plays a role in religion (dogmas, cult, ritual and doctrines) did not exist for him at all. 'He [*Jesus*] is at the same time the most profound thinker and the most childlike human being. What he says is so self-evident' (in Brüllmann 1986:113).

■ Researching and appropriating Jesus: what the Schweitzer story can teach us

Like other great philanthropists of the 20th century, Schweitzer was certainly not a perfect man. That he, in his context, was paternalistic can be true, but to my mind it can never cancel the charitable work he has done in Lambarene. Arm-chair middle-class present day theologians (black or white) who search for evidence in his personality to discredit his achievements must do that at the cost of the manifold witnesses

of the black people amongst whom he worked and who profited from his charity.

As far as South African contact with Schweitzer is concerned, I came across a tribute to Schweitzer written in 1962 by a medical doctor from Welkom, South Africa, P. W. Labuschagne, who visited Lambarene in 1959. As his remarks testify to Schweitzer's positive influence and example that contributed to a positive attitude amongst South Africans, despite apartheid, one cannot but wonder if Schweitzer not also eventually contributed to the relative peaceful political solution decades later.⁵⁵ I translate from the German (Bähr 1962):

It is logical that in a land like South Africa that is inhabited by many races, the land should be prepared to internalise the ethics of love in action, and 'reverence for life'. The meaning of Dr Schweitzer for us in South Africa is that we now attempt to understand our mutual problems and to respect our feelings, so that we in peace and love in a brotherly fashion can live together. In this manner, we want to make known which effective influence the personality and way of thinking Dr Schweitzer has on the life and thinking of South Africa. (p. 408)

The world is in desperate need for more Ghandis, Hobhouses, Kings, (Saint!) Theresas, Schweitzers, Mandelas, Naudes and Tutus. Why? Because these exceptional people have shown that it is indeed possible to follow Jesus of Nazareth's teaching and deeds in the present-day world, how difficult it may be. The increase in secularism and scepticism with an appeal to

55. Besides Labuschagne's positive appraisal, Schweitzer was a popular figure amongst Afrikaans people, as the Afrikaans translation of Thomas (1960) testifies.

Darwinism, the so-called accusation regarding the demand of crucifying the intellect by Christian doctrine, should be exposed by Schweitzerian thought, especially his demand for an ethic of 'reverence for life' which is able to bridge the gap between all religions as well as faith and science (see Schweitzer 1966). If there would be a better philosophy, religion or world view than that of Jesus of Nazareth, such should be put on the table and Christianity abandoned. If not, Christians and non-Christians alike are challenged to follow Jesus, as Schweitzer said, in their peculiar contexts today and in the way unique to every individual with an ethic of love that combines word and deed. That such concrete following is difficult and almost impossible, our own lives may be witnesses to. But that it is not totally impossible is confirmed by the above-mentioned names, of which Albert Schweitzer's is prominent.

■ Chapter 7: Summary

This contribution addresses some issues which can be regarded as misunderstandings about Albert Schweitzer, or even by Schweitzer himself, regarding the Jesus scholars he wrote about in *The quest for the historical Jesus*. They pertain to the following: (1) the misunderstanding that Schweitzer through his research history brought historical Jesus studies to a close for at least 50 years, (2) the notion that Schweitzer has proven through his study that all historical Jesus research is invalid because every researcher only reads his own image of Jesus into his construction

of the latter, (3) the often uncritical assumption amongst many scholars that Schweitzer, in his book, correctly analysed and evaluated the 18th, 19th and early 20th century scholars which he discussed, (4) the assumption that Schweitzer had no construction of the historical Jesus of his own, or that the one he had was beyond criticism, (5) that Schweitzer, with his doctoral dissertation in medicine, has shown that any psychological understanding of Jesus or the Bible should be abandoned, and (6) that the historical Jesus is confined or locked up in the first century and has no meaning for today.

The ‘myth’ of the ‘no quest’: Albert Schweitzer, Jesus of Nazareth, and Africa⁵⁶

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■ Introduction: Jesus the unknown? And the question is?

According to Albert Schweitzer (1931; cf. Dawes 1999:205–212), Jesus of Nazareth did not deem it necessary to disclose the ‘secret’ that he was the Messiah whose true identity would one day

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56. Here the term ‘myth’ is used not in the technical sense of the word, but in populist terms as a ‘widely believed fiction’ [Smith & O’Loughlin n.d.].

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be revealed. This conviction can be seen, amongst others, in the conclusion to his famous work on Jesus ([1906] 1913:642).⁵⁷ For Schweitzer (my paraphrase), Jesus could not be known by either wise (sincere) or simple (insincere) people. Jesus reveals himself in the toils, conflicts and sufferings that his followers *will* experience. Though they cannot know him, he becomes known to them in their own experience. This is a mystery. Our constructions of God are shaped by our own experience. This is not a weakness.

The question is whether Albert Schweitzer initiated the ‘no quest’: the idea that it is not possible to know the historical Jesus. Schweitzer’s work, *Geschichte der Leben Jesu Forschung*, is often used to distinguish between the so-called ‘old quest’, the ‘new quest’ and the ‘third quest’. The ‘no quest’ is seen to have preceded the ‘new quest’. It is contended that the ‘no quest’ was initiated by Schweitzer and promoted by Bultmann. With regard to the various ‘quests’, Sean Freyne refers to ‘waves’.⁵⁸ Helen Bond (2011) uses the term ‘four approaches’ and summarises them as follows:

.....
 57. The original: ‘*Als ein Unbekannter und Namenloser kommt er zu uns, wie er am Gestade des Sees an jene Männer, die nicht wußten wer er war, herantrat. Er sagt dasselbe Wort: Du aber folge mir nach! und stellt uns vor die Aufgaben, die er unserer Zeit lösen muß. Er gebietet. Und denjenigen, welche ihm gehorchen, Weisen und Unweisen, wird er sich offenbaren in dem, was sie in seiner Gemeinschaft an Frieden, Wirken, Kämpfen und Leiden erleben dürfen, und als ein unaussprechliches Geheimnis werden sie erfahren, wer er ist ...*’ (Schweitzer [1906] 1913:642).

58. Freyne (1997:91) is ‘convinced that the present ‘third wave’ quest for the historical Jesus is no more free of presuppositions than any of the other quests that went before it. Nor could it be otherwise, no matter how refined our methodologies. If we are all prepared to say at the outset what is at stake for us in our search for Jesus—ideologically, academically, personally—then there is some possibility that we can reach an approximation to the truth of things, at least for now. Even that would be adequate’.

The Quest, as any introductory textbook will verify, is usually divided into four broad periods: the Old Quest (from Reimarus to Schweitzer, 1778–1906); the period of No Quest (from Schweitzer to Käsemann, 1906–1953); the New Quest (from Käsemann, 1953 to roughly 1985); and the Third Quest (roughly from 1985 to the present). As an initial orientation, this scheme is certainly useful in mapping the broad contours of research into the life of Jesus. Yet, it is clearly an over-simplification, and like all over-simplifications there comes a point when the four-fold schema may begin to obscure rather than to clarify (p. 338)

One example of an explanation that obscures rather than clarifies is the distinction made between 'new quest' and 'no quest'. The impression is that the 'new quest' was a reaction to the 'no quest'. This idea was attributed to Schweitzer because of his criticism of his antagonists, the 'liberal theologians', who were exponents of the 'old quest'. The misconception is reinforced by the idea that Bultmann and Schweitzer agreed that Jesus could not be known.⁵⁹ This would make Bultmann one of the most important exponents of the 'no quest'.

■ Schweitzer and Kähler

The perception that Schweitzer initiated the so-called 'no quest' did not originate with Schweitzer himself or with Bultmann.

59. According to Graig Evans, one of many who regard Bultmann's form criticism as having had a negative impact on the quest for the historical Jesus, '[i]n Germany the quest all but came to a halt' (Evans 1993:13).

The ‘no quest’ originated with the systematic theologian Martin Kähler⁶⁰ (1835–1912).

Kähler demonstrated more insight into sources behind the Gospels than Schweitzer.⁶¹ He valued the ‘standards of contemporary historical science’ (Kähler [1896] 1969:218), was aware of the ‘fragments of various traditions’ (Kähler [1896] 1969:219) and distinguished between the Synoptics and the Gospel of John with regard to the ‘reliability of the records’ on Jesus (Kähler [1896] 1969:219 note 3). He acknowledged the ‘validity of psychology’ if it ‘rests demonstrably upon experience’ (Kähler [1896] 1969:222). The ‘criterion of analogy’ (see Troeltsch [1898] 1913:729–753), so central to the historical-critical approach, presupposes that the ‘manifoldness of reality’ in earliest Christianity should be acknowledged (Kähler [1896] 1969:222). Kähler lauds exegetes searching for historical analogies between the world of Jesus and that portrayed in the

60. In this article the English translation, *The so-called historical Jesus and the historic, biblical Christ*, reproduced in G.W. Dawes (1999:216–238) is used for Kähler’s *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Christus* ([1896] 1969).

61. However, Stanley Porter (2009:25–33) is of the opinion that some ‘criteria of authenticity’ used by historical Jesus scholars have been prompted by ‘direct response to Schweitzer’s challenge for historical method’ (Porter 2009:25), such as the ‘criterion of double dissimilarity, drawing distinctions between contemporary Jewish messianic expectations and the way the early Church wished to depict Jesus’ (Porter 2009:26) and the ‘criterion of Semitic language and environment’, because of ‘Schweitzer’s concern for literary traditions in Judaism, as well as his devotion of an entire chapter in his *Quest* [pp. 269–285] to the study of Aramaic’ (Porter 2009:31).

contemporary Judaic and Hellenistic literature (Kähler [1896] 1969:223). On the application of this 'criterion of analogy', however, Schweitzer and Kähler differed substantially.

Though Schweitzer never referred to Kähler's distinction between *historisch* [historical] and the *geschichtlich* [historic] (see Meier 1990:10), John Reumann (in Meier 1990:10, note 21) is of the opinion that 'Schweitzer may well have known Kähler's distinction but purposely suppressed Kähler's work on the subject. For Kähler "the historic, biblical Christ" is not "the historical Jesus"'. According to Dawes (1999:215) this distinction represents a *theological* reasoning rather than a *historical* reasoning. For Schweitzer, *ethics* and *theology* are two sides of the same coin. According to him, Jesus' 'whole ethical outlook [is] ruled by the contrast of "Now and Then"'. As the 'future Messiah' the historical Jesus (Schweitzer [1914] 1985):

must preach and work that higher morality. The poor in spirit, the meek, those that endure suffering, those that hunger and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, – these all are blessed because by this mark they are destined for the Kingdom. (p. 161)

According to Kähler, a *historical* contextual analysis can be done, but from a *theological* perspective it is not possible to draw an analogy between Jesus and other historical figures. He formulates it as follows:

The distinction between Jesus Christ and ourselves is not one of degree but of kind ... We cannot ... deal with Jesus merely by removing the

blemishes from our own nature – that would merely leave us with a blank tablet ... In the depths of our own being we are different from him, so different in fact that we could become like him only through a new birth, a new creation. How then can we hope to analyse and explain Jesus' development, its stages and changes, in analogy with the common experience of humanity? Indeed, if we look deeper we encounter the objection, How could he have been sinless in the midst of a world, a family, and a people so full of offense? How could the boy Jesus develop in a pure and positive way when in his years of infancy, filial dependence, and immaturity he was surrounded by bad influences, and when his whole education, however well meant, must have been on the whole distorted? All this is a miracle which cannot be explained merely in terms of an innocent disposition. It is conceivable only because this infant entered upon his earthly existence with a prior endowment quite different from our own, because in all the forms and stages of his inner life an absolutely independent will was expressing itself, because God' grace and truth became incarnate in him. In view of this fact we would all do well to refrain from depicting his inner life by the principle of analogy. (pp. 222–223)

However, for Schweitzer, the 'nature of Jesus' in the dogmatic sense of tension between his *godliness* and his *humanity* is not the core of the problem. The distinction regarding his *ontological nature* and the distinction that is made between the *historical Jesus* and the *Christ of the kerygma* is not a matter of either/or. Biblical scholars who focus on the latter do not necessarily accept only the humanity of Jesus. Kähler, however, did find that this would be the consequence. Since he did not want to question the godliness and humanity of Jesus, he doubted whether it was at all possible, or fitting, to do historical Jesus

research. It was not *possible*, he argued, because the life of the historical Jesus could not be reconstructed from literary records in the canonical gospels and other first century documents. Kähler's contribution was his distinction between the 'Jesus of history' and 'the [*sic*] historical, biblical Christ'. This distinction between the 'proclaiming Jesus' and the 'proclaimed Christ' is based on his dogmatic distinction between Jesus' godliness and his humanity.⁶² Kähler does not make the distinction between *historical* and *biblical* and the ontological distinction between *godly* and *human* because of his interpretation of Schweitzer.

Kähler did not do historical Jesus research a favour by equating these respective distinctions. His work rather served to reinforce fundamentalist Christians who doubt the value and validity of historical criticism and who reject a hermeneutics of suspicion.

■ Schweitzer the medicine-man

However, my argument above does not take away that Schweitzer ([1906] 1913:367; cf. Joy 1948:23), like Kähler, was indeed critical of the uncritical historical approach of both psychologists and theologians. Schweitzer was particularly critical of theories about Jesus and mental disorders. In the doctoral thesis for his final medical examinations, *The psychiatric*

62. According to Otto Michel (1995:352–253), Kähler regarded the notion 'Jesus as true God and true man' as a 'predogmatic' belief (cf. Meier 1990:6 note 9).

study of Jesus (Schweitzer [1913] 1948), he responded to the work of four ‘psychopathologists’ (cf. Capps 2003:621–662) who claimed to have built on his view of Jesus as a ‘wild’ apocalyptic prophet (Schweitzer [1913] 1948:46–53).

By means of ‘psycho-pathological’ methods (‘the investigation of the mental aberrations of significant personalities in relation to their works’) (Schweitzer [1913] 1948:33) these (‘insincere’) scholars depicted Jesus as suffering from hallucinations and paranoia (Schweitzer [1906] 1913:362–367). Similar to the ‘liberal theologians’ (‘freisinnigen Theologen’) of the 19th century, they constructed a ‘liberalized, modernized, unreal, never existing Jesus ... to harmonize with [*their*] own ideals of life and conduct’. (Joy 1948:19). Schweitzer puts it as follows (Schweitzer [1913] 1948):

[*They*] busy themselves with the psychopathology of Jesus without becoming familiar with the study of the historical life of Jesus. They are completely uncritical not only in the choice but also in the use of sources ... We know nothing about the physical appearance of Jesus or about the state of his health. (p. 19)

It is a ‘psychological fallacy’ (Van Aarde 2015) to presume to be able to evaluate Jesus’ mental health.

Could it be possible that Schweitzer’s so-called negligence of recognising the validity of indigenous African ritual healing during his Lambaréné period was influenced by his ‘wisdom’ as ‘village psychiatrist’, as Donald Capps (2010) calls Jesus? In his work, Capps (2004:89–124) deliberately moves beyond

Schweitzer's understanding of Jesus' healings. According to Capps, the historical Jesus healed somatoform disorders (Capps 2010). On the one hand Schweitzer did not prohibit his patients to go to traditional healers. In her work, *The many faces of healing*, Michelle Mairesse (2006) relays the astonishment of 'Western visitors' who visited Schweitzer in Lambaréné:

A few Western physicians who have practiced alongside healers from other traditions are less concerned about the theoretical aspects of medicine. When the great Dr. Albert Schweitzer established a medical mission in Gabon early in the twentieth century, Western visitors were astonished at Schweitzer's deference to the local witch doctor, whom Schweitzer addressed as '*mon chère collègue*'. Schweitzer explained that he admired the witch doctor's ability to deal with mental illness, so he sent him patients, just as the witch doctor routinely sent Schweitzer patients who would benefit from Western medicine. In neither case did the two doctors understand the therapeutic system of the other, but both doctors' respected results. (p. 6 of 7)

Malrese (p. 6 of 6) pleads for recognition by, for example, the World Health Organisation of 'traditions, insights, and skills of practitioners from the four corners of the earth ... All nations, great and small, can make a contribution in the health of humanity. Let the healing begin'.

■ Schweitzer and Bultmann

Bultmann ([1926] 1988:8–10) was critical of both the 'fallacy of misplaced concreteness' and the 'fallacy of psychologism'.⁶³

63. The 'fallacy of psychologism' refers to '[T]he practice of reducing a biblical figure, word, or event to "nothing but" a psychological phenomenon, e.g., a neurosis' (Rollins 2015:507–514).

This in no way detracts from his and Schweitzer's interest in the historical Jesus (Bultmann 1988:13). Bultmann was convinced that more could be said about the teaching of Jesus than the 'no questers', such as Kähler would care to admit (see Painter 1987:102). According to Bultmann ([1926] 1988:13), we have sufficient knowledge of Jesus' teaching to construct a coherent portrayal of who he was.⁶⁴

The context of Bultmann's remark was the aftermath of the First World War. By then Schweitzer's criticism of the 'liberal theologians' ('old questers') and his description of them as 'insincere and uncritical' in their historical approach was already widely known. At that point Walter Schmithals was secretary of the 'Marburg Circle', the group of Bultmann's students and others who were interested in his hermeneutics. He knew that Bultmann did not deem Schweitzer a proponent of the 'no quest'. According to N.T. Wright (1999:83–120), the 'new questers' (Bultmann's students) did not take the first-century 'Jewish' context seriously. John Painter (1987:101), on the other hand, acknowledges that Bultmann and Schweitzer's view of Jesus was that of 'a Jew in the context of the diversity of Judaism'.

Schweitzer and Bultmann have a strikingly similar view of Jesus' ethics. Bultmann's ([1928] 1969:220; cf. [1960] 1965)

64. My paraphrase of Bultmann ([1926] 1988:13): '*von seiner Verkündigung wissen wir so viel, daß wir uns ein zusammenhängendes Bild machen können*'.

reconstruction of the historical Jesus is succinctly summarised by him as follows:

Characteristic for [*Jesus*] are exorcisms, the breach of the Sabbath commandment, the abandonment of ritual purifications, polemic against Jewish legalism, fellowship with outcasts [*deklasierten Personen*] such as publicans and harlots, sympathy for women and children; it can also be seen that Jesus was not an ascetic like John the Baptist, but gladly ate and drank a glass of wine. Perhaps we may add that he called disciples and assembled about himself a small company of followers – men and women. (n.p.)

Bultmann's students parted ways with him (e.g. Käsemann [1964] 1969:36) because he was not sufficiently interested in the historical Jesus (Käsemann [1964] 1969:23–65; cf. Bultmann 1965). According to Schmithals⁶⁵ ([1926] 1988:149), this was based on the 'greatest misunderstanding'.⁶⁶ With regard to the distinction between *historisch* and *geschichtlich* they agreed with him. *Historisch* refers to the *historical factualness* of an event, whereas *geschichtlich* refers to the *existential consequence* of such

65. In Schmithals' German words: 'Als Bultmann nach dem ersten Weltkrieg sein Jesusbuch schrieb, stand darum für ihn fest, "daß wir vom Leben und von der Persönlichkeit Jesu so gut wie nichts mehr wissen können" [Bultmann 1988:10]. Es ist ein groteskes Mißverständnis, wenn man diesen Satz gelegentlich in dem Sinne zitiert findet, nach Bultmanns Meinung könne man von Jesus nichts mehr wissen. Bultmann hat nie daran gezweifelt, daß wir uns ein hinreichend deutliches Bild von der Lehre und also von den Absichten und dem Werk Jesu verschaffen können'.

66. In his response, Bultmann (1965:36) notes: 'Denn ich bin mit Käsemann ganz darin einig, daß die Sache wichtiger ist als die Personen, und daß der Zusammenhalt einer Gemeinschaft, wie sie zwischen Käsemann und mir bestand und besteht, Spannungen ertragen muß, unter denen das persönliche Verhältnis nicht zu leiden braucht, – Spannungen, deren Diskussion nur zur Klärung der Sache, an der uns gelegen ist, beitragen kann'.

an event (cf. Labron 2011:28; Van Aarde 2014:256). The students disagreed with Bultmann's emphasis on the *that* ('Daß') of Jesus being more important to faith than the *what* ('Was') (see Bultmann 1965:9).

The departure of the students from their mentor was attributed to the influence of Schweitzer's so-called 'no quest' (via Kähler⁶⁷). However, for both Schweitzer and Bultmann God's act of mercy and redemption was affected in and through the *historical human being*, Jesus of Nazareth. Neither Schweitzer nor Bultmann rejected historical Jesus research. Bultmann, as a dialectical theologian who shares Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Heidegger's views on the hermeneutics of historical interpretation (see Pelser & Van Aarde 2007:1378–1379),⁶⁸ made the distinction between

67. John Meier (1990:10, note 23) speculates 'that, if it had not been for Bultmann's recycling of Kähler's distinction [*between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of faith*], the latter's work might have been lost to large sectors of the theological world outside of German Lutheranism'.

68. Pelser and Van Aarde (2007:1379) describe such a Schleiermacher-Dilthey-Heidegger chain as follows: 'Authentic understanding is the *Nach-erleben* (after-experience) of an original *Erlebnis* (life experience). But it is always simply a *Nach-erleben* and is never identical to the original experience. Those who 'understand' can indeed place themselves in the original situation, but they never detach themselves from their own situation, so that they always understand from the perspective of the latter. Only in this way can the strangeness be overcome and will understanding not be a mere repetition of the original. That understanding is possible, is situated in the time-spanning universality of life's movement. It is the same principle of life which found expression then, and now makes a re-experience possible. Historical knowledge is therefore possible thanks to the similarity of knower and known as revelations of the same maxim of life'.

historisch and *geschichtlich*. The former refers to what occurred in the past (*Sein*) and the latter to what from the past was relevant to the present and future (*Dasein*). The former he called the *what* ('Was') and the latter the *that* ('Daß'). The distinction between *historisch* and *geschichtlich* therefore correlates with the distinction between the *what* ('Was') and the *that* ('Daß') of Jesus. It is clear that Bultmann was not indifferent to historical Jesus research.

In a dramatic meeting of the 'Marburg Circle', Bultmann (1965:190–198), in his *Antwort an Käsemann*, reacts despondently to Käsemann who wanted to promote his 'new quest' over against what he regarded as Bultmann's 'no quest', with the words: *O Absalom, mein Sohn, mein Sohn!* [Oh Absalom, my son, my son!] (see Schmithals 1968:262). Walter Schmithals (1988:149–158) described Käsemann's understanding of Bultmann as a *ein groteskes Mißverständnis* [huge misconception] (Schmithals 1988:149). This misconception puts a huge question mark behind the stereotyped manner of speaking by describing Käsemann's Jesus study as the 'new quest' and by describing Bultmann as the proponent of a 'no quest' (cf. Van Aarde 2014:260).

Bultmann did not regard the quest for the historical Jesus of Nazareth as irrelevant. He distinguishes between a *inhältliche Diskontinuität* [discontinuity of content] and *sachliche Relation* [continuity of intent] (Bultmann 1965:191). *Discontinuity of*

content refers to the followers of Jesus conceptualising his words differently. An example is when Jesus spoke on death and his followers construed it as Jesus giving his life for others. In actual fact Jesus meant to say that they should not be afraid of death, but should live by faith alone. Then nothing would separate them from God. An example of *continuity of intent* is where Paul, though using different language, understands and continues Jesus' intent regarding a life by faith alone (cf. Jüngel [1990] 1995:82–119).

■ Schweitzer and Wrede

To construe Schweitzer and Bultmann as 'no questers' is a mistake. In Schweitzer's history of Jesus, *From Reimarus to Wrede*, written in narrative form,⁶⁹ he distinguishes between 'wise' and 'simple' people. 'Simple' is, for instance, to take supernaturalism or anti-supernaturalism to the extreme. 'Wise' is to achieve a balance between what is *mysterious and spiritual* and what is *rational*. The work of William Wrede (1859–1906) attests to such a balance. Schweitzer differs from Wrede on certain points, such as that the Messianic secret is not the theology of Jesus but rather Markan theology (Wrede [1901] 1971). Schweitzer appreciates that Wrede is open to the mystery of the Messiah's message. N.T. Wright (see Stein 2001:207)

69. C.K. Barrett (1975:5–6) points out that in this 'narrative' on 'A sketch of the life of Jesus', Schweitzer 'smuggled' inside his 'analysis of Wrede's work' seventy five pages of his own sketch of Jesus.

describes the difference between them as the *Wredebahn* [the broad way] and *Schweitzerstraße* [the narrow path].

According to Wright (1999:83–120), the Jesus Seminar is on the 'broad way'.⁷⁰ Schweitzer appreciated but also differed from Wrede. I appreciate but differ from Schweitzer. Wrede's historical criticism led to a different theology than Schweitzer's. Though I follow Wrede's historical criticism and differ especially from Schweitzer's understanding of the 'mystery of the kingdom of God' and his rationalisation of 'Jesus' eschatology', I do agree with Schweitzer on the ethics of Jesus.

My interpretation of the Gospel tradition of Jesus' 'messiahship' differs from that of Schweitzer. Jesus did not ever call himself the 'Messiah'. The earliest Jesus-followers were 'messianists' and venerated him as such after his death. They were the ones responsible for 'Christianising Jesus'. I understand the 'Christianising of Jesus' as a process of transformation: Jesus of Nazareth was transformed from a human being to an apocalyptic Son of Man (Van Aarde 2004:423–438). When attributing this role to the earliest Christian followers, I do not question the belief that Jesus is the symbol of God's presence, both fully human and fully divine. However, Jesus' 'two natures' is a post-New Testament confession, only traces of which can be found in the New Testament itself (see Van Aarde 1999:437–470).

70. Does the term 'Wredebahn' imply an *Autobahn*, the 'broad way' of 'sinners' and 'heretics', in other words Schweitzer's 'insincere' ('simple') 'freisinnige' theologians?

Yet, both from a biblical theological and a dogmatic perspective, Christian ethics should not be seen as an abstract ideology, but rather as a concrete matter based on the humanness and humaneness of Jesus of Nazareth.

■ Schweitzer and the kingdom of God

Schweitzer's interpretation of Jesus as an apocalyptic follows a different route than my view on the 'Christianising of Jesus'. His understanding of the apocalypticism of Jesus has been called a *consistent* ('thoroughgoing') *eschatology*. He builds on the work of Albrecht Ritschl (1822–1889) (Ritschl [1882] 1972; cf. Dawes 1999:154–171) and Johannes Weiss (1863–1914) (Weiss ([1892] 1971; cf. Dawes 1999:173–184) who regard the kingdom of God as the core of Jesus' message. According to Ritschl the kingdom is a transcendent supramundane other-worldly construct. This has immanent ethical consequences. The kingdom of God is the divine governance and administration: a) where human rights are subordinate to God's right; b) where there is no correlation between reward and worthiness on the one hand and punishment and unworthiness on the other hand; c) where there is no congruence between misfortune and guilt on the one hand and prosperity and goodness on the other hand. According to Weiss, the kingdom of God was not founded by Jesus. Jesus prepared the way for the kingdom which was yet to come. The opposite of the kingdom of God is the reign of

Satan, another kind of *basileia*. If Jesus delivers people from oppressors and enemies, it is about more than political enemies. It includes deliverance from afflictions of body and soul caused by Satan. The consequence of such affliction is *tristia* [sadness]. According to Weiss, there is a relationship between Jesus' parables and miracles. The parables create an awareness of the kingdom of God. The miracles are the manifestation of the kingdom, signs of what is yet to come.

Schweitzer's 'thoroughgoing eschatology' does not separate parables and miracles in this way. Miracles are already an immanent reality. His approach is 'modern historical', rather than 'old dogmatic'. Jesus' death is the example par excellence of how the ethics of the kingdom of God functions in this world. In the divine administration no distinction is made amongst people. At first people accepted his ethics, but when they were faced by the consequences they rejected it. At first Jesus was disappointed and withdrew to the margins of society. Then he realised that this rejection was part of the human condition which he had to accept, but also wanted to challenge. He then deliberately went to Jerusalem to confront the source of the rejection. This led to his death. The human condition is like a turning wheel. Jesus of Nazareth intended to put a spoke in the wheel.

Bultmann's version of this radical *Entscheidung* [de-attachment] is that in and through the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth the

kairos has come. The time for making history is up in the sense that to 'be reigned by God is to not be subordinate to anything of this world' (Gathercole 2000:281). It is a *Entgötterung* [de-idolisation] of the world. Bultmann (1963:338) describes such a *Entscheidung* [de-attachment] dialectically as both a *Freiheit von der Welt* [freedom from the world] and a *Verantwortung für die Welt* [responsibility to the world].⁷¹

Schweitzer's way to internalise such a Jesus-consciousness is, as theologian, to resign from the academy and to start anew by de-attaching himself from being a New Testament professor in Strasbourg, the capital of the Alsace, today's northeastern France, close to Kaysersberg where he was born and to move to Günsbach, where he grew up, and where his father was the Lutheran pastor. He studied medicine and he settled in Africa.

■ Schweitzer the 'African' – let the healing begin

In his earlier writings on 'cultural philosophy' between 1914 and 1917 Albert Schweitzer described the ethical decline of Western culture whilst he himself was *im Urwald Afrikas*

71. For Schweitzer and Weiss in God's kingdom 'all natural relationships are abolished ... all is reign' (Gathercole 2000:281). In his response to John A. Robinson's (1963) *Honest to God* (Bultmann [1963:335] translated as 'fair' rather than 'ehrlich') and Gabriel Vahanian's work, *The death of God: The culture of our post-Christian era* (1961), Bultmann (1963:338) concurs with Gerhard Ebeling (1959:97–98) and Friedrich Gogarten (1953:8) in that the most *decisive* factor of the Christian belief is Christianity's contribution to secularisation. See, also Gabriel Vahanian ([1998] 1999). 'The otherness of time: Secularisation as worlding of the Word and the hallowing of time'.

[in the African jungle] (Schweitzer [1923] [1990] 1996). His departure from largely French-speaking Alsace-Lorraine (Strasbourg) to French Equatorial Africa (Lambaréné), and the establishment of a hospital on the Oguoué River in the Central African rainforest in 1913 was not devoid of socio-political context. This part of Africa had been influenced by French imperial politics and European Christian missionary activity since 1885. Libréville, the capital of Gabon, was occupied by France in 1839. The population was mostly Mpongwé (cf. Thomas 2007:44). This harbour city on the Komo River, close to the Gulf of Guinea, is still of great economic importance today, especially because of the export of timber. Libréville (Freetown) was established in 1846 when 52 people from the slave ship *Elizia*, which was overpowered by the French, were settled there (cf. Ansprenger 1989:103). Round about the 1930's 84.6% of the world consisted of colonies and former colonies of European powers (Fieldhouse 1989:373). When the timber industry gained momentum, a quarter of the population of Gabon 'disappeared', probably due to slave trade activities in the area (cf. Rich 2007:21). Ecological problems as a result of the timber industry, and the ensuing decline of agriculture led to food shortages in the area where Schweitzer had settled as doctor and theologian (cf. Fourchard 2008:159–161).

Albert Schweitzer can be regarded as a pioneer of what became known in the 1990's as postcolonial theology (cf. Moore 2000:182).

Today postcolonialism is seen as the phenomenon where previous colonial powers still exercise power over their former political victims, but now by means of a global economy and military and cultural supremacy. According to Fernando Segovia (1998:51 note 3), postcolonial studies reflect on the discourse and practice of imperialism and colonialism from a position where imperialism and colonialism have largely and formally, but not totally, come to an end. In practice, they still manifest as neo-imperialism and neo-colonialism. From the perspective of a hermeneutics of suspicion, postcolonial theories question privilege and power, refuse to acknowledge the supremacy of Western culture and aim to foster a greater equality.

As epilogue, I offer an appraisal of and express my appreciation for Schweitzer's 'Life of Jesus theology'. Dieter Georgi (1992) summarises his journey with Schweitzer's work as follows:

Albert Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* had hinted that the scholarly interest in the historical Jesus always had been more than a part of the history of ideas. These hints now gained stronger meaning for me [Dieter Georgi].⁷² I became more interested in the social environment of the inquirer, my own as well as that of others, present and past ... In this environment the interest in Jesus as a superhuman individual became prominent again. This Jesus was touchable as a human but at the same time larger than ordinary life, ready again to influence and determine human beings and now in

72. In my Jesus book, *Fatherless in Galilee* (Van Aarde 2001) I concur with Georgi's view.

particular those of the new, bourgeois class. Life of Jesus theology developed further in close interplay with the socioeconomic and ideological evolution of the European bourgeoisie, as one of its motors as well as its conscience.(p. 52, 56)

In remote Lambaréné, Gabon, West Africa, Albert Schweitzer became the conscience of Europe as the first 'postcolonial' theologian and medicine-man. For Schweitzer, the relationship between parable and miracle in Jesus' words and deeds was akin to the relationship between theology and medicine. The combination means a life in God's presence as an instrument of God's healing. Like Jesus of Nazareth, the Israelite who crossed all boundaries, so Albert Schweitzer was the European who crossed unimaginable boundaries. However, Schweitzer also became the conscience of Africa. For him the kingdom of God was the alternative to the hubris of both the imperial powers of his day and the neo-colonial power of the newly established African elite. They have not succeeded in making headway with poverty in postcolonial Africa (including South Africa and Gabon), nor have they made progress in bridging the gap between the newly rich and the marginalised poor.

Let us, as South African theologians, whatever our history, whether our forbearers are from Africa or Europe, reclaim Africa as our home and embrace the value of healing as promoted by Albert Schweitzer. Let us renounce hybridity and all forms of marginalisation.

■ Chapter 8: Summary

The chapter argues that Albert Schweitzer's understanding of Jesus as 'the unknown' ('als ein Unbekannter und Namenloser') has resulted in the mistaken idea that the quest for the historical Jesus is historically impossible and theologically undesirable. This misunderstanding can be traced back to systematic theologian Martin Kähler. In light of the 'principle of analogy' he regarded it as impossible to compare the historical Jesus with any other human being in history. Schweitzer, however, did not use Kähler's categories. The chapter compares the ethics of Schweitzer with the insights of William Wrede and Rudolf Bultmann. The aim of the chapter is to demonstrate a correlation between Schweitzer's understanding of 'kingdom of God' in light of Jesus' ethics and Schweitzer's decision to settle in French Equatorial Africa (Gabon). His work in Africa can be described as that of 'village psychiatrist'. As the first 'post-colonial' theologian, Schweitzer challenges us to also see in Jesus the image of healer.

The point of departure of Descartes' philosophy is: 'I think, therefore I am'. This simplistic and randomly chosen starting point reduces it hopelessly to the realm of the abstract. It does not open the door to ethics. The philosophy remains captive in a lifeless world view. Authentic philosophy should start from an immediate and comprehensive awareness. Put another way: 'I am life in search of life in the midst of life that is in

search of life'. This is not a well thought-out sentence. I am constantly refining it. Whenever I reflect on it, I am constantly surprised by something new. Like a root that never withers, it sprouts a world view and philosophy of life which are vibrant with all facets of being. The mystique of the ethical unity with all that is, grows from it. (Albert Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik* [1923] [1990] 1996:330; my translation)⁷³

73. Schweitzer's ([1923] [1990] 1996:330) German: 'Bei Descartes geht das Philosophieren von dem Satze aus: "Ich denke, also bin ich". Mit diesem armseligen, willkürlich gewählten Anfang kommt es unrettbar in die Bahn des Abstrakten. Es findet den Zugang zur Ethik nicht und bleibt in toter Welt- und Lebensanschauung gefangen. Wahre Philosophie muß von den der unmittelbarsten und umfassendsten Tatsache des bewußtseins ausgehen. Diese lautet: "Ich bin Leben, das leben will, inmitten von Leben, das leben will". Dies ist nicht ein ausgeklügelter Satz. Tag für Tag, Stunde für Stunde wandle ich an ihm. In jedem Augenblick der Besinnung steht er neu vor mir. Wie aus nie verdorrender Wurzel schlägt fort und fort lebendige, auf alle Tatsachen des Seins eingehende Welt- und Lebensanschauung aus ihm aus. Mystik ethischen Einswerdens mit dem Sein wächst aus ihm hervor'.

Part 4

**Other legacies of Albert
Schweitzer reconsidered**

Albert Schweitzer, herald of the ‘greening’ of Christianity?

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■ Introduction

In his book *Twentieth-Century Theologians*, Philip Kennedy (2010a:1–16) argues the case for the 1960s being always remembered as a decade during which the world changed radically.⁷⁴ A heart pacemaker was devised and the first heart transplant was carried out. The astronaut Yuri Gagarin became

74. One of the theologians whose views Kennedy discusses is Albert Schweitzer (cf. Kennedy 2010b).

the first person to travel in space, and Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin were the first to walk on the moon. However, during this decade a number of states developed and detonated nuclear bombs to impress the rest of the world and to show their military muscle. Devastating wars were fought between India and Pakistan, between the USA and Vietnam and between Israel and its neighbours. And then the Berlin Wall was erected; the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. took place and Nelson Mandela was sentenced to life imprisonment. Kennedy states (2010a):

Of all the years during the tumultuous 1960s, 1968 stands out as a period of dizzyingly rapid cultural change. To this day it is remembered as an emblematic signpost of social and political upheaval. (p. 7)

Whilst concurring with Kennedy's description of the 1960s, I want to argue the point that, theologically speaking, 1965 was far more important than 1968. I offer four reasons for my viewpoint. Firstly, the year 1965 was the closing year of the second Vatican Council, which had the task of 'updating' the life and doctrinal formulations of the Catholic Church (Berkouwer 1965). Secondly, Albert Schweitzer died in September of that year, leaving the Western world his philosophy of 'reverence for life'. Thirdly, James Lovelock formulated his Gaia hypothesis in that same month (Gribbin & Gribbin 2009:125) and unintentionally gave credence to Schweitzer's philosophy. Fourthly, John A.T. Robinson published his book *The New Reformation?* (1965), suggesting that a possible second Reformation may occur in his lifetime. He even called Dietrich

Bonhoeffer the ‘John the Baptist of the new Reformation’ (Robinson 1965:23). The wisdom of hindsight and the publication of works by Don Cupitt, Anne Primavesi and Lloyd Geering convinced me of the importance of the year 1965. What follows is a short introduction to their viewpoints and those of other scholars. This may serve as a warrant for my conviction that Albert Schweitzer should be acknowledged as the herald of the ‘greening’ of Christianity, which, according to Nash (1989:87), took off in all seriousness in the 1980s.

■ Albert Schweitzer: reverence for life

Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965) became an icon in the 1950s, almost as Nelson Mandela (1918–2013) became one in the nineties. They did not aspire to have, or to gain iconic status, but their lives and actions inspired people to live their lives in new ways.⁷⁵

Schweitzer was already an accomplished philosopher, New Testament scholar and musician when he decided to become a medical doctor to serve other people. In his autobiography, *Out of my life and thought*, he claims that the historical Jesus preached a ‘religion of love’ (Schweitzer 2009:53–60). He thus felt the urge to go into the world and to practise this religion of love by

75. Pieter Botha (2015) recently published an excellent article on Albert Schweitzer’s ethics. Another publication which deserves readers’ attention is the book *Reverence for life: The ethics of Albert Schweitzer for the twenty-first century* (Meyer & Bergel 2002).

serving a group of people who most urgently needed help from others if they were to survive and live their lives as well as they could. He did not feel obliged to impose the Christian doctrines which had been developed centuries after Jesus' death on people who had a totally different understanding of the world. He was not interested in 'cloning' African people to become mirror images of European or American Christians. In his own words (Schweitzer 2009):

I wanted to be a doctor so that I might be able to work without having to talk. For years I had been giving myself in words, and it was with joy that I had followed the calling of theological teacher and preacher. But this new form of activity would consist not in preaching the religion of love but in practising it. (p. 92)

However, this urge to serve others should also be linked to his conviction that civilisation in the Christian world was on the decline (Schweitzer 1923). The outbreak of the First World War (1914–1918) increased his concern for Western civilisation, but he eventually concluded that the world needed people whose way of living reflected a clear vision of what life is all about. Life is not about material progress or becoming rich and living a carefree life. Life is about living in such a way other living beings and plants may benefit from it. According to Schweitzer, all our thinking and acts are driven by an ethical command (2009:151). The nature of that ethical command was not totally clear to him, although he studied the philosophies of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860). However,

one day, whilst travelling in a steam boat on the Ogowe River in French Equatorial Africa and seeing a herd of hippos, he realised that ‘reverence for life’ was the ethical command or drive that should guide people’s lives (Schweitzer 2009:155). People should come to their senses and realise that they are not the only entities on this planet that are alive and would like to live. According to Schweitzer, Descartes’ well-known phrase ‘I think, phrase *Cogito, ergo sum* [I think, therefore I am], which is the catch phrase of his philosophy, does not make complete sense and should be elaborated on. People do not just think. They usually think about ‘something’. The ‘something’ which should be of primary concern and which should be thought about is the will to live. The whole planet is full of living beings that would like to live, procreate and flourish. He phrased this as follows: ‘I am life that wills to live in the midst of life that wills to live’ (Schweitzer 2009:156). This phrase became one of the catch phrases of his philosophy of reverence for life. He extended it by saying (Nash 1989:61; Schweitzer 2009:157–158):

[a] man is ethical only when life as such is sacred to him – the life of plants and animals as well as that of his fellow men – and when he devotes himself to helping all life that is in need of help. (n.p.)

It is astonishing that Albert Schweitzer (as a Lutheran) did not reflect on the Bible and its authority, nor did he attempt to translate the Bible into one of the indigenous languages of French Equatorial Africa. He was not interested in imposing the orthodox Christian doctrines or the idea of the Trinity on non-Christian people living on another continent. Although he

was of the opinion that Jesus' message of the Kingdom of God was intertwined with an eschatological expectation of the end of the world, he was convinced that this translates into acts of loving, serving and caring for all living beings. Schweitzer thus translated the expectation of the end of the world into what Barsam and Linzey (2004:172) call 'practical eschatology'. He lived as if he was living in the end times. Schweitzer was less concerned with dogmatics (or Church doctrines) than he was with ethics. He had a fervent desire to perform the love preached by Jesus (Schweitzer 2009:87). He was convinced that humans are embedded in the natural world and that they have to live an ethical life by loving, serving and caring for all forms of life. According to Roderick Nash (1989:62), 'Schweitzer made it his lifework to think through the details of "the ethic of love for all creation"'.

The Afrikaans poet Lina Spies gives excellent expression to this ethic of 'reverence for life' in her poem '*Die geloofsbelydenis van 'n afvallige*' ('Credo of a heretic') (Spies 2004). An extract from the poem reads as follows:

*Ek glo dat omdat ek lewe
ek aan alle lewendes
sorg en deernis verskuldig is. (p. 23)*
[I believe that since I'm alive
I need to show compassion and to care
for all living things.]⁷⁶

76. This is my translation of the Afrikaans.

Schweitzer acknowledged that he was a liberal theologian, or at least a liberal New Testament scholar and he even feared that his convictions might prevent him from travelling to Africa and becoming a missionary doctor (2009:92–93). However, it was his liberalism that contributed to the development of his ethic of reverence for life. He became a legend in his lifetime and received the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1952 for his work at his hospital in Lambaréné (Afulezi & Afulezi 2002:291–308). However, he expressed the hope that future generations would remember him for his conviction that humans should develop a reverence for life on Earth. It is therefore not strange that Rachel Carson (1907–1964) dedicated her book *Silent Spring* (1962), which dealt with the devastating effects of DDT on the environment, to Schweitzer. Carson warned the authorities that the indiscriminate use of DDT was killing more than mosquitos. The book launched the environmental movement in the USA and became a classic (Carson 2002). Schweitzer’s name and philosophy are closely associated with the book and, according to Nash (1989:62), ‘When Schweitzer died at the age of ninety, in 1965, the environmental movement was starting to lengthen its stride along the course he had outlined’.

■ James Lovelock a marvellously self-regulating earth

In the same month that Albert Schweitzer died, James Lovelock (1919–) formulated his Gaia hypothesis (Gribbin &

Gribbin 2009:125). The hypothesis concerns 'a self-regulating Earth with the community of living organisms in control' (Lovelock 2009:105). Lovelock argued that Earth was a living system and that all the subsystems contributed to Earth's well-being and to its ability to sustain life. However, after the industrial revolution (mid-19th century), human activities began to undermine Earth's ability to sustain life. Lovelock's hypothesis became as influential as Schweitzer's ethic of reverence for life, and both scholars are currently regarded as key thinkers on the environment (Allaby 2004; Barsam & Lindzey 2004; Palmer 2004).

Lovelock did not take note of Schweitzer's philosophy. He was, after all, neither a theologian nor an ethicist but a scientist. Moreover, he did not belong to one of the mainline British churches but was associated with the Quakers (Lovelock 2009:158). He did not grow up in a family with strict religious ideas, but, as a youngster and later as a student, he became acquainted with the Quakers and shared some of their convictions – inter alia that Christians should be peacemakers and should not become involved in wars. He held to this conviction until the outbreak of the Second World War (1939–1945), when the evils of Nazism brought about a change of mind and he was no longer a conscientious objector. However, he could not adhere to the Allies' policy on the mass bombing of German cities. Although Lovelock

does not mention Albert Schweitzer's stance on the development and use of nuclear weapons, he surely would have associated with such a viewpoint. However, he does not oppose the use of nuclear power to generate electricity. On the contrary, he is a staunch supporter of the building of nuclear power stations, seeing that they do not pollute the environment in the way coal power stations do (Lovelock 2009:89–91).

Apart from the fact that we can associate both Schweitzer and Lovelock with September 1965, we can also associate them with Rachel Carson and her book *Silent Spring* (1962). As previously pointed out, Carson dedicated it to Schweitzer and his philosophy of 'reverence for life'. Lovelock, on the other hand, developed the 'Electron Capture Detector' (ECD), which supported Carson's argument that the use of lethal chemical compounds like DDT was not only killing pests but was also harming the environment and thus undermining the living conditions of birds and other small animals. Lovelock shared Carson's views on ecology and the web of life, and her message in a CBS documentary in 1964 resonated with his. She said (Gribbin & Gribbin 2009):

Man's attitude towards nature is today critically important simply because we have now acquired a fateful power to alter and destroy nature. But man is a part of nature, and his war against nature is inevitably a war against himself. (p. 110)

Through his research, Lovelock became more and more convinced that his hypothesis was not a mere pipe dream, and Lynn Margulis (1938–2011) played an important role in supporting him (Gribbin & Gribbin 2009:130–131). She actually convinced him that 'microorganisms are at the heart of Gaia' (Gribbin & Gribbin 2009:136). Some of these microorganisms were responsible for the oxygen in the atmosphere which made life, as we know it, possible. Earth's primordial atmosphere did not contain free oxygen. This was only later 'added' by microorganisms. However, they not only added oxygen but also removed carbon dioxide (Skinner & Murck 2011:322–324). A number of discoveries by other scientists soon supported his conviction that life on Earth is intertwined with its environment. If the environment is suddenly and radically changed, life suffers and species become extinct. It could also be argued that all the subsystems on Earth contribute to the existence of life and, if a subsystem is tampered with, or undermined, this has a devastating effect on the system as a whole, making life on Earth almost unliveable. Researchers also discovered all kinds of ecological feedback mechanisms which supported Lovelock's hypothesis.

Although some scholars prefer to talk of 'Earth System Science' rather than of the 'Gaia theory', their understanding of how Earth works and how the different subsystems contribute to the existence and flourishing of life on Earth, they do not substantially differ from Lovelock's hypothesis. Take, as an

example, the book *The Blue Planet*, whose authors, Skinner and Murck (2011), follow a systems approach to the study of Earth. In the preface to the book, they define their approach as follows (Skinner & Murck 2011):

Earth system science ... is the study of Earth as an assemblage of open systems, and the goal of the science is to eventually understand the interactions among all parts of the assemblage. (p. iii)

The subsystems they identify and discuss are: (1) the geosphere, (2) the hydrosphere, (3) the atmosphere, (4) the biosphere, and (5) the anthroposphere or the ‘human sphere’. Of the last-mentioned, the authors say (Skinner & Murck 2011):

Humans have always changed their local environment, but when the human population was small, these changes happened so slowly that they did not alter the Earth system. Now the population is large and growing even larger (...) There are now so many of us that we are changing Earth just by being alive and going about our business. In doing so we are taxing the resources of the Earth system and the capacity of the system to manage impacts. (p. 16)

They give credit to Lovelock for his conviction ‘that life has altered the environment at a global scale throughout life’s history on Earth and continues to do so’, but they are reluctant to embrace his view that the Earth system is a ‘coherent system of life, self-regulating, self-changing, a sort of immense organism’ (Skinner & Murck 2011:431). Although some Earth scientists regard the Gaia hypothesis as controversial, it caught the attention of theologians like Rosemary Radford Ruether, Anne Primavesi and Lloyd Geering.

These theologians are currently at the forefront of the 'greening' of Christianity. But before we discuss their viewpoints, we have to take note of John A.T. Robinson's book *The New Reformation?* (1965) and Don Cupitt's *Reforming Christianity* (2001), as the new reformation and the 'greening' of Christianity are closely related and could be seen as two sides of the same coin.

■ John A.T. Robinson: the new reformation

John A.T. Robinson (1919–1983), an Anglican bishop, attracted attention when he published his book *Honest to God* in 1963. The book introduced English-speaking Christians to the theological views and reflections of three German theologians: (1) Dietrich Bonhoeffer, (2) Rudolf Bultmann and (3) Paul Tillich. He claimed that since the three-decker universe of the Bible and the Christian creeds has collapsed, people are struggling to make sense of the idea that God exists 'out there' and that he came to earth 'like some visitor from outer space' (Robinson 1963:15). The three German theologians introduced new ways of thinking and talking about God and Robinson maintained that English-speaking Christians deserved to be introduced to their thoughts. An article published in *The Observer*, under the heading 'Our image of God must Go', contributed to the furore that erupted after the publication of the book itself (Beeson 1999:137). However, he weathered the storm and remained a bishop of the Anglican Church.

In 1965 he published another thought-provoking book titled *The New Reformation?* Although it was not intended to be a sequel to *Honest to God*, it contained statements that accorded with those in the previous book. He commences with an analysis of the predicament of theology and the mainline Churches in the mid-twentieth century, writing (Robinson 1965):

The great classical doctrines of the creation and governance of the world, predestination and election, pre-existence and immortality, the generation and procession of the Persons of the Trinity, angels and the Devil, heaven and hell, the last judgment and the second coming – these cannot be painted with the assurance or the detail on the wide canvases beloved of our forefathers. (p. 23)

Robinson was able to work speedily through the latest theological publications and then shared the information with ordinary readers. However, he remained hesitant when it came to exploring new answers. In the words of John Bowden (1993:81): ‘It’s striking how often his books suggest that things *may* happen (rather than being made to happen), and in the end how little did’. In a sense, he remained conservative and attached to traditional Church doctrines and so did not explore ways of bringing about a new reformation. For this to happen, theology in the English-speaking world had to wait until the 21st century.

■ Don Cupitt: the religion of life

Don Cupitt (1934–) is a prolific author who publishes a book almost every year. One that attracted a great deal of attention

was *Reforming Christianity* (Cupitt 2001). It could almost be said that, whilst Robinson expressed some reservations about a possible new reformation (take note of the question mark in the title of his book), Cupitt went all the way and indicated not only which Church doctrines Christians living in the 21st century could do without, but also how a new reformation could come about and what it might entail.

He opens his book with the declaration that the Bible has lost its status as a public standard of religious truth, saying: 'We no longer hear One Voice in the Bible: we hear only a crowd of different human voices' (Cupitt 2001:1). With this statement, he supports the convictions of critical biblical scholars who argue that the biblical books were written by humans living in a world that was totally different from ours and whose statements cannot be equated with the voice of God. To acknowledge this is to profoundly affect what one believes about Jesus. It is evident that the four gospels present four different profiles of Jesus, so one cannot equate the Jesus character of the gospel of Mark with the Jesus character of the gospel of John (Den Heyer 2003:189–203; Vermes 2000:6–21). However, later theologians preferred the depiction of Jesus in the gospel of John ('the Father and I are one') and combined this with Paul's message about a first and a second Adam (Rm 5; 1 Cor 15) to create a Grand Narrative of a cosmic fall, redemption and judgment. Moreover, they equated this narrative with the gospel that Jesus preached (Mk 1:14–15). However, critical study by New Testament scholars has shown beyond doubt that

Jesus never preached the Grand Narrative of orthodox Christianity (Kennedy 2006:145–155). In Cupitt's own words (2001):

The man Nazareth, preached the here and now possibility of immediate religion. He whose teaching sparked off the development of Christianity, Jesus of called it by a curious and rather new name, 'the Kingdom of God' (p. 6)

What is the Kingdom of God that Jesus preached? The Kingdom, according to Cupitt, has nothing to do with some spiritual kingdom established by Jesus during his lifetime, a kingdom which will eventually break through triumphantly when he returns to vanquish the Devil and his angels. The Kingdom has to do with life here and now: '... it is a new ethic, and a new way of relating oneself to life' (Cupitt 2001:8). The new reformation thus means abandoning the traditional doctrines. Christians should no longer set their sights on a new heaven and a new earth but on life in the present world. We are not heading towards a second coming but towards a scorched earth unless we resolve to take responsibility for the world in which we live. We should stop believing in life after death and rather focus on life before death. We should 'get ourselves into a stable relationship with our natural environment' (Cupitt 2001:109).

Two of Cupitt's later books elaborated on the views expressed in *Reforming Christianity* (Cupitt 2001). These are *Life, life* (Cupitt 2003) and *Above us only sky: The religion of ordinary life* (Cupitt 2008). Many living in the 21st century find it nonsensical

to address God as if he were a personal being living in the skies above. Instead of looking towards the skies (which are empty), people should instead embrace life on earth, treating it with reverence and respect.

In addition, we should also take note of his book *Radical Theology* (Cupitt 2006), which is dedicated to John A.T. Robinson. The book contains an essay focusing on the impact of the book *Honest to God* during its forty-year existence. Cupitt (2006:121) acknowledges that he was not deeply affected by the book when it first appeared. However, he later realised that Robinson was influenced by the philosophy of Martin Buber (1878–1965), just as Albert Schweitzer was influenced by the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer. He then makes the following noteworthy comment: 'Schweitzer, following Kant, took a non-realist view of God; for him God was just Love, a guiding spiritual ideal. Robinson's topic was Martin Buber's personalist philosophy of religion ...' (Cupitt 2006:122–123).

Buber argued that we, as humans, usually relate ourselves in two distinct ways to whatever we are dealing with: '... [W]e may treat it as impersonal, or we may respond to and address it as utterly personal'. He called the two attitudes, the *I-It* and the *I-Thou* attitudes (Cupitt 2006:123). However, as it is possible to relate to every living thing on earth and to the cosmos as a whole in an *I-Thou* relationship, this can be our way of being religious.

We feel addressed by something bigger than ourselves and we want to respond to this address. However, we could never lay claim to that which addresses us. We could never define and describe the eternal ‘Thou’. So both Schweitzer and Robinson took a non-realist view of God, suggesting that God is a word created by humans to assist them in their thinking and response to that which lays claim to them. However, Robinson was not as consistent as Schweitzer in his reasoning. He sometimes writes as though ‘God exists independently of human faith in him’, a more realist than non-realist view of God (Cupitt 2006:124).

■ Lloyd Geering: the ‘greening’ of Christianity

Lloyd Geering (1918–) is often called ‘the Don Cupitt of New Zealand’ (Leaves 2006:41). He is certainly as prolific an author as Don Cupitt. He first entered the limelight when he published an article for *Reformation Sunday* (31 October) in September 1965.⁷⁷ The article was published in *Outlook* (the New Zealand Presbyterian weekly) and he supported and elaborated on the views expressed by John Robinson in his book *The New Reformation?* He argued that the Church and theology were in need of a new reformation. However, this was not well-received

77. The latest number of the periodical *The Fourth R* (September–October 2015) has been dedicated to Lloyd Geering and carries the following captions on the front page: ‘The Geering Affair’ and ‘The heresy trial fifty years later’.

by all the readers of *Outlook*. In the following year, after he had published a second article on the resurrection of Jesus, he found himself accused of heresy (Geering 2007:131–146). It is interesting that he was an Old Testament scholar at Knox College in Dunedin at this stage of his life, and he did not hesitate to side with critical Old Testament scholars. Concerning the Bible, he wrote (Geering 2002):

Since the modern revolution in understanding the Bible we are now able to go further than the Reformers and declare that the Bible also can err, and frequently does, for it was composed by humans. (p. 137)

Apart from being critical of the Bible he is also critical when it comes to the traditional Church doctrines. Like Cupitt, he expresses the view that numerous people living in the 21st century find the doctrines of orthodox Christianity incompatible with current knowledge. They find it difficult to believe that the Bible is divinely inspired and wholly reliable. They find it difficult also to believe that God is a personal being who responds to prayer and acts in our world. Moreover, that there exists only one true God and that is the Trinity which Christians have confessed since the fourth century. If we take into account that Christianity is barely 2000 years old and that the human species to which all current human beings belong (*homo sapiens sapiens*) existed on earth for almost 200 000 years, then it cannot claim to be the only true religion. It does not make sense. What about all the religions which existed before Christianity appeared on the scene? Are all humans who lived before the

formulation of the Nicene Creed (fourth century) and who practised their different non-Christian religions, in the wrong and are they thus destined for hell? (Geering 1999:13–82).

Geering is fond of claiming that humans are currently experiencing a second Axial Period (Geering 1999:153–154, 2002:45–48, 57–58). The idea of an Axial Period goes back to the German philosopher Karl Jaspers (1883–1969), who identified such a period in history between 800 and 200 BCE. He claimed that during this period a number of key figures lived all over the world and that their philosophies and messages shaped humanity for the better. He refers, *inter alia*, to the Hebrew prophets, to Confucius, the Buddha and Zoroaster. What is currently happening is that our God-talk is radically changing because our understanding of the cosmos, our environment and ourselves is changing. Moreover, the world is becoming increasingly smaller because of globalisation, whilst the different religions and philosophies are impacting on each other. In the Western world in which Christianity dominated the religious scene for more than 1500 years, people are taking leave of the Father-Creator God idea. Moreover, a number of theologians and neurologists are convinced that humans are the creators of their religions and their gods. The Dutch theologian Harry Kuitert expresses it succinctly: *Eerst waren er mensen en toen God* [First there were humans and then there were gods/God] (Brinkman & Vijver 2004:9). The Dutch neurologist and neurophysiologist Dick Swaab (2014:285–312) concurs.

If humans are the creators of meaning (and their gods), then they should be able to revise and adjust their received religious traditions. When it comes to Christianity, this should entail a move in the direction of becoming more ecologically sensitive. In this regard, some Christians promote the idea of 'stewardship' and emphasise that Christians should become better stewards than they have been (Nash 1989:95–96). Geering, on the other hand, maintains that Christians should take the views of Lovelock more seriously: 'Simply learning to be better stewards, then, is not enough. Christianity must make more radical changes in its understanding of our place and role in nature' (Geering 2005:18). This will mean taking leave of the orthodox idea of a perfect world which collapsed because of the sin of Adam and Eve and of Jesus coming to Earth to save humanity from Original Sin and damnation. The Christian doctrine of sin, which stresses that humans exist in a tragic state of alienation from the God who created them in his own image, should be replaced by the reality that humans are currently in a state of war with the planet which brought them forth (Geering 1999:133).

■ Anne Primavesi: sacred Gaia

An interesting fact which should not go unnoticed is the role played by women since the early years of the environmental movement and the introduction of the Gaia hypothesis.

Next to Albert Schweitzer stands Rachel Carson, and next to James Lovelock stands Lynn Margulis. I did not discuss her role and that of Carson in detail, as the focus of this chapter is the question of whether Schweitzer can be regarded as the herald of the ‘greening’ of Christianity. That is, whether there is a golden thread which runs from Schweitzer through Robinson to Cupitt, Geering and Primavesi, not forgetting the role Lovelock’s hypothesis plays in the ‘greening’ of Christianity.

Strangely, John Robinson did not pay attention to the environmental movement and how the theory of evolution impacted on traditional Church doctrines, although he was well aware that Christians experience problems with these doctrines because of a changed world view. When one embraces evolutionary biology, nothing can remain the same, as Steve Stewart-Williams argues in his book *Darwin, God and the meaning of life: How evolutionary theory undermines everything you thought you knew* (2010). Robinson introduced Christians to new ways of thinking about God, but he never linked this to the theory of evolution. On the other hand, Anne Primavesi, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Lloyd Geering are theologians who do not hesitate to embrace current scientific knowledge and to use the Gaia hypothesis in their theological reflections.

A decade before the publication of Stewart-Williams’ book, Primavesi (2000:37–38) had already argued that Christian

theologians were still short-circuiting the theory of evolution by believing (1) that humans did not evolve from other species, (2) that they do not evolve as other species do, (3) that our species alone is made in God's image, (4) that our species has been unique since God became a member of it, and (5) that we know 'through divine revelation' what will happen to our species at the end of times.

In her books *Sacred Gaia* (2000) and *Gaia's gift* (2003), Primavesi engages these convictions, arguing that Christians should revisit the traditional Church doctrines in the light of current scientific knowledge. The fact that her views are discussed last may leave the impression that she is mere a follower of Geering and that she supports (or even repeats) what he has written. That is not the case. Her books were published almost a decade before Geering published *Coming back to earth: From gods, to God, to Gaia* (2009). Readers may also ask why Rosemary Radford Ruether's views are not discussed, seeing that she is a feminist theologian who uses the Gaia concept in her theological reflections. She published a book, *Gaia and God: An ecofeminist theology of earth healing* (Ruether 1994), before Primavesi published hers. The reason why I have chosen to discuss Primavesi's views is that she is critical of Christians' reading of Genesis and of the role this book played in the development of the Grand Narrative of Christianity. She is more critical of the traditional doctrines than Ruether, who '... tries to keep different aspects of the Christian story

intact, even while reinterpreting the concepts in a radical way' (Deane-Drummond 2002:196).⁷⁸

Primavesi is adamant that Christians should revisit traditional Church doctrines, such as Adam and Eve being the first persons to bring death into the world with their disobedience (Gn: 2–3). Informed people today know that death has been part of life since the start of life on Earth. Furthermore, we today know that Jesus did not die on the cross to conquer death and to save humanity from perdition. Jesus died on the cross 'as a victim of imperial militarism' (Primavesi 2000:41). She is also critical of the principle of 'hierarchy' in Christian thinking. According to this idea, 'the Trinity presides above the angels, who are above the ecclesiastics, who are above the laity' (Primavesi 2000:123). The principle of 'hierarchy' is then carried over to relationships in this world: hierarchy endorses 'the political and military authority of royal institutions' (Primavesi 2000:124) and endorses men's authority over women and nature (Primavesi 2000:131).

It is evident that the Gaia hypothesis assisted Primavesi in arguing that Christianity is at the cross-roads and ought to abandon the Grand Narrative, which has been a guiding

78. Richard Grigg criticises Ruether's depiction of modern science as well and writes: '... while ecology is close to Ruether's heart, she is much more suspicious about natural science in general. It has not, in fact, been value-free, she tells us. It is not purely objective, as it claims, but is often subjective' (2008:46).

narrative since the fifth century. What Christianity needs, according to her, is a new narrative which takes into account our current knowledge of the Earth and how life on it evolved and where humans fit into this story. Human beings can no longer view themselves as stewards of God's creation, nor can they promote the conviction that everything was created for their sole use and benefit.

■ Conclusion

The world has seen major changes in the 50 years since Albert Schweitzer died. These changes have impacted on what Christians have traditionally believed. More and more theologians are of the opinion that Christianity's grand narrative of 'Fall–Atonement–Judgement' (Kennedy 2006:255) can no longer harmonise with our current scientific knowledge. Even natural scientists share this viewpoint. To give but one example: James Lovelock wrote the following in *Gaia: A new look at life on earth* (1995):

Biblical teaching that the Fall was from a state of blissful innocence into the sorrowful world of flesh and the devil, through the sin of disobedience, is hard to accept in our contemporary culture. (p. 100)

Conservative theologians are reluctant to embrace the new knowledge and to develop a new narrative for Christianity. Some of them are aware of the ecological crisis that humans are facing and try to develop a theological response, but without taking note of comments by scientists like Lovelock. They still

want to adhere to Church doctrines like (1) the Bible is God's authoritative word for time and eternity, (2) humans are created in the image of God, (3) humans are God's stewards on Earth, (4) Jesus became a human being to atone for Original Sin and to save humanity from perdition, (5) Jesus will eventually return to judge humanity and to create a new heaven and a new Earth. Modern evolutionary biology has forever undermined these doctrines. It has proven beyond doubt that humans have evolved from previous life forms – therefore humans carry plant genes in their DNA. A large number of modern biblical scholars do not regard the Bible as an authoritative document which should guide humans in their thinking and acting. Furthermore, research has proven that Jesus was a Jewish prophet who lived in the first century and practised early Judaism. The kingdom he preached had nothing to do with establishing a spiritual kingdom where sorrow, poverty, pain and death will no longer exist. The kingdom of God that he preached stood in opposition to the kingdom of Caesar (Malina 2001). He introduced a 'nonviolent, anti-imperial religious reform movement within Judaism', but unfortunately this soon 'morphed into the official, militaristic religion of the very violent Roman Empire' (Nelson-Pallmeyer 2005:11). Schweitzer did not share this understanding of the kingdom that Jesus preached, although he was correct in claiming that Jesus' eschatological expectation concerned his world. However, Schweitzer's philosophy of 'reverence for life'

opened up a new avenue for Christians living in the 21st century to develop a new narrative with a new ethic which could harmonise with our current scientific knowledge and our concern for the Earth and her well-being. That avenue runs through the research and reflections of Rachel Carson, James Lovelock, Lynn Margulis, John A.T. Robinson, Don Cupitt, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Anne Primavesi and Lloyd Geering as well as other scholars whose publications I have not yet read and who are promoting a 'greening' of Christianity.

■ Chapter 9: Summary

Albert Schweitzer died 50 years ago, leaving the world his philosophy of 'reverence for life'. In the month of his death, James Lovelock formulated his Gaia hypothesis. These two male scholars were hardly aware of each other's existence and so did not engage with each other's viewpoints. However, a woman called Rachel Carson dedicated her book *Silent Spring* (1962) to Schweitzer. Lovelock took cognisance of her opinions, as he too had become aware of human interference with the ecology of the planet. Lynn Margulis soon came out in support of Lovelock's view that the Earth functions as a self-regulating system, but emphasised the role of microorganisms in creating a habitable environment for larger forms of life. The year 1965 is important for another reason: John A.T. Robinson published his book *The New Reformation?* in that year. Lloyd Geering promoted

Robinson's perspectives, eventually becoming a staunch supporter of the 'greening' of Christianity. Don Cupitt is well-known for his conviction that Christianity is in need of reform, and he maintains that Church Christianity is being overtaken by a 'religion of Life'. Although his publications do not reflect direct influence by Schweitzer or Lovelock, it is evident that his theology of Life is in line with the 'greening' of Christianity. This observation applies also to the feminist theologians Anne Primavesi and Rosemary Radford Ruether. They too refrain from referring to Schweitzer's philosophy and do not promote a new reformation, but their feminist stance and their embracing of the Gaia hypothesis show that they are at home in the 'greening' of Christianity. The chapter argues a case for the shift in our religious vocabulary over the past 50 years from God-centred to Life-centred vocabulary. This can be traced back via the above-mentioned scholars to Schweitzer and his philosophy of 'reverence for life'.

The educational legacy of Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965)

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■ Orientation

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight salient aspects of the educational thought of Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965) and to determine the relevancy of his ideas for current educational practice.

During the 17th century, Sir Isaac Newton, one of the most influential scientists of all time, wrote to his rival, Robert Hooke: ‘If I have seen a little further it is by standing on the shoulders of

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Giants' (Wikipedia Contributors 2015). In this way, he attributed his extraordinary foresight in the field of Mathematics to the accumulated work and knowledge of his predecessors. Those who intend finding solutions to the educational problems experienced in South Africa at present would do well to also utilise relevant knowledge and understanding that were gained by esteemed individuals from the past.

In this regard, there is arguably no better time to stand on the shoulders of Dr Albert Schweitzer, the Franco-German theologian, organist, philosopher and physician, amongst other things, because he emphasised the inculcation in young people of a spirit of ethical responsibility and of a reverence for all things – the very attributes which, according to the *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy* (DoE 2001), are missing from the South African educational scene. There is a distinct possibility that educationists can benefit from a reflection on the myriad pronouncements which Schweitzer has made concerning education. Especially his major work, *The Philosophy of Civilisation* (1923), and his autobiographical writings, *Memoirs of Childhood and Youth* (1924) and *Out of My Life and Thought: An Autobiography* (1931) are rich in powerful observations about, for example, the schools he attended, his teachers, and about teaching and learning in general.

For the author of this chapter, who has a special preoccupation with milestone dates, there are also more sentimental reasons to re-examine the views of Schweitzer on, for example, the

administration, purpose, content and methods of education: this year (2015) Albert Schweitzer would have celebrated his 140th birthday. It is also exactly 50 years after his death. In addition, for many years he was lauded for his philosophical convictions and the way he implemented these in practice. However, as a result of, amongst other things, the influence of decolonisation and the civil rights movement of the 1960s, his idolised status in both Europe and Africa suddenly faded and he sank into oblivion (Harris 2014:805). Maybe it is now, almost two generations after his death, a convenient time to revisit and to subject to historical examination the once inspiring ideas of this multitalented giant who was previously regarded as a heroic figure, in renown second only to Albert Einstein (Harris 2014:804).

A discerning reader would probably have noticed that ‘educationist’ was not mentioned in the list of characterisations of Schweitzer above. In addition, this venerable missionary’s relatively long list of publications does not include any works that primarily deals with education. Why then, would he be an ideal person to authoritatively speak on educational matters? The answer can be found in Schweitzer’s unique experiences of schooling and teachers, his familiarity and regular contact with European institutions of higher education, and the successful implementation of his theories in practice.

As Schweitzer explains in his *Memoirs of Childhood and Youth*, many of his views on life and the world, like his respect for

silence, the value of contemplation and the need to become aware of the pain and suffering that characterises the world, originated in his personal experiences at school. He learnt a lot regarding the nature of teaching and learning from his father, his uncle Louis (with whom he stayed for the duration of his school career), Ms Anna Schäfer (teacher at the Girls' School in Münster who stayed with his uncle) and Dr Wehmann (his class teacher whom Schweitzer describes as his role model and from whom he learnt the immense educative power of a sense of duty). In his *Memoirs* (1957:39, 42) Schweitzer stresses how much he valued the examples of sound teaching practice that were set by Dr Förster, his Natural Science teacher, and Wilhelm Deecke (principal of the Mülhausen School). From them, he respectively learnt that the mystery of nature and the force which is called 'life' can never be uncovered or fully understood and that teachers should not merely convey knowledge. Instead, teachers should assist learners to become fully human – this is the main purpose of teaching and learning. In short, Schweitzer can undoubtedly be regarded as someone who possessed 'much schoolmaster blood' (Schweitzer 1959:26).

From 1893 to 1898, Albert Schweitzer studied at the University of Strassburg and, before he reached his thirtieth birthday, he obtained doctorates in Theology, Philosophy and Music as well as a then much sought after Licenciate in Theology. In 1901 he was provisionally appointed as Principal of the

Theological Seminary of Saint Thomas from which he had just graduated and in 1903 this appointment was made permanent. For nine years he also taught theology at the University of Strassburg. At the turn of the century he introduced a series of lectures on German philosophy and literature which he presented to the 'Foreign Language Society' in Paris (Schweitzer 1959:28). In 1905 he decided to serve as a missionary physician in Africa and for this purpose returned to the Strassburg University as a student to study medicine. In February 1913 he qualified as a medical doctor and almost immediately thereafter left for Africa where he would eventually stand in the front rank in the experience and practice of tropical medicine. During the following five decades he regularly returned to Europe for short periods to, for example, give lectures on a variety of subjects (including aspects of the education of young children) and to perform organ recitals. According to Abrell (1981:294), Schweitzer was 'an educator of the deepest dye, speaking to education in both his writings and speeches'.

An important reason why Schweitzer went to Africa was to make his life an example of his ethical and philosophical convictions and, indeed, during the first six decades of his stay in Gabon, he succeeded in turning many of his ideas into practice in his small village hospital. His educational thought also found practical expression in the missionary school at Lambaréné (Harris 2014:805). His ideal of reverence for life did not remain confined to Africa. It spread to, for example, Germany, Turkey

and Korea where, in the 1960s, it was reported that Schweitzer's philosophy was successfully introduced in the schools of those countries (Joy 1967:268). There can be little doubt that education was a close concern of Schweitzer's during his entire life and that Schweitzer was well qualified to address the subject of education.

Albert Schweitzer was convinced that 'without philosophy no education is possible and without education there can be no ethics and no religion in a scientific era' (Schweitzer 1900 in Joy 1967:305). The philosophy which Schweitzer formulated and upon which his whole life and thought were built, is known as reverence for life.

■ Reverence for life

Schweitzer devoted many years of his life in search of a philosophy that could provide direction to people's lives. He studied both the Eastern and Western thought of his time, but neither provided him with direct answers (Crain 2009:4). During the late 19th century, like most critics of his time, Schweitzer noticed signs of cultural decline and elements of self-destruction in the various societies of the world. He became convinced that the world civilisation was following a path of decay and degeneration and reached the conclusion that the underlying cause for this looming crisis was a lack of true ethics.

In 1915 he found the inspiration required to develop his own philosophy, which crystallised into a simple formula: reverence for life. From then on he promoted the view that civilisation could only be rescued if the ethic of reverence for life could be implemented, amongst other things, through educational processes (Schweitzer 1960:85–93). Subscribing to, and meticulously living according to, this philosophy can be regarded as Schweitzer's overarching purpose of education.

Schweitzer's reverence for life philosophy involves the notion that one can achieve spiritual harmony in life by accepting reality, working to the best of one's ability, and being ethical (Levinson 2009:85). He held the opinion that all human beings are individuals who 'will to live' and who are inevitably connected to all other life that also 'wills to live' (Schweitzer 1960:278). An individual's ethical task is to afford every other individual the same admiration and respect that one demands for oneself. In essence, respect for life not only compels individuals to live in the service of other people and of every living creature, but also becomes the highest principle and the defining purpose of humanity (Schweitzer 1960:xi–xvi, 9–20), and by implication, also of education. According to Schweitzer (1936 in Joy 1967:255), having reverence for life deepens the spiritual relationship of human beings to something vast and mysterious, 'for life continues to be a mystery too great to understand'.

In an attempt to more accurately describe the meaning of the concept reverence and the spiritual relationship which Schweitzer mentioned, Woodruff (2001) explains that reverence is:

the capacity for a range of feelings and emotions that are linked. It is a sense that there is something larger than a human being, accompanied by capacities for awe, respect, and shame. (p. 63)

According to Rud and Garrison (2012:55–56) reverence also, ‘invokes feelings of shared adoration and wonder at the kind of higher meanings and values that connect individuals together in a community, such as truth, learning, and justice’. Amongst other things it involves a recognition of individual limitation, of patience, curiosity, silence and infinite possibility.

At this stage, one would certainly be justified to ask what bearing Schweitzer’s dictum of reverence for life has on the practice of education; how does theory find expression in practice? Except for emphasising certain themes to be addressed by means of education, Schweitzer did not spell out the prescriptive function of his philosophy for educational practice. However, in two interesting publications, *Albert Schweitzer’s Legacy for Education* (Rud 2011) and *Teaching with Reverence. Reviving an Ancient Virtue for Today’s Schools* (Rud & Garrison 2012), the authors attempted to directly apply Schweitzer’s philosophy to educational practice and to illustrate what educators and learners ought to do to attain reverence for life. In order to understand how Schweitzer’s philosophy can possibly be practically applied in an educational context, it may

be worthwhile to consider a few examples of what Rud (2011:68) calls, ‘practical reverence’.

According to Rud and Garrison (2012:1), teaching with reverence is the spiritual dimension of classroom teaching. Teaching is often conceived exclusively as about imparting skills and knowledge that will serve learners well in their careers and lives. However, good teaching also involves, for example, forming character, creating an enduring passion for learning, appreciating beauty, respecting silence and caring for others. Teaching is therefore a spiritual (not necessarily a religious) activity that paves the way for human sociability and intimacy. Reverent teaching allows teachers to find creative self-expression in the classroom community.

Reverent teachers have a deep respect for their learners, whilst they are simultaneously seeking to deserve the latter’s respect through their superior wisdom, moral character and/or abilities. They exert strong leadership and include learners in their deliberations for everyone stands to learn something from one another in a truly reverent classroom. Although teachers may surpass learners in knowledge and wisdom, everyone deserves respect. Teachers must be sensitive to, and acknowledge, occasions when learners know more and even display greater wisdom than they do (Rud 2011:71).

Reverent teachers are not arrogant but rely on others to provide innovative ideas and solutions to problems.

They pursue moral and intellectual ideals that reach beyond mandated testing. Amongst other things, reverent teachers utilise rituals and ceremonies to unite learners and to create mutual respect. In the final analysis, teachers teaching with reverence seek to ensure that everyone, teachers and learners alike, are equally humbled before the might of the mystery of life (Martin 2015:248; Rud 2011:69–72, 77).

Reverent teachers also reveal awe and wonder before the subject matter they teach. They realise that they have inherited the culture and knowledge they work with – it is not solely of their own making. They acknowledge the wisdom realised by those who preceded them. They exemplify the good of their practice, are never arrogant or presumptuous toward their students and are humbled by their sense of limitation (Rud 2011:70).

With regard to knowledge, reverent teachers do not only listen carefully to what the subject matter has to say to them, but also accept the risk and vulnerability of openness to what learners may suggest. This implies that good teachers have the moral perception and imagination to connect to both their learners and the intellectual command of the subject matter. In practice, the philosophy of reverence for life requires that teachers act as much more than ‘knowledge workers’ refining human resources for the global production function. They have to nurture the ‘greater possibility’, the ‘seeds of growth’ in their

learners. This means ‘nurturing an unknown’ which requires faith, respect and ‘an admiring wonder’ for the unknown as well as the unknowable in learners (Rud 2011:70; Rud & Garrison 2012:10).

Part of the human condition is that all humans feel pain and that they suffer and grieve. Reverence for life expresses care and compassion for suffering whilst seeking and celebrating joy, well-being and peace. Therefore, according to Rud and Garrison (2012:7) a teacher’s reverence for life in the classroom will ‘compassionately ameliorate anguish’ whilst simultaneously seeking to bring about joy.

In order to show even more clearly how theory should be turned into practice, Rud and Garrison (2012:8) refer to classroom discipline. Reverence for life requires that discipline should never constitute an ego struggle between teacher and learner. Because learners keenly value justice and fair play, teachers should take care not to act in a biased manner. They should realise that even mischief-makers in the classroom deserve a degree of respect when disciplinary measures are considered. The severity of the teacher’s judgment should be calmed by the teacher’s compassionate caring, but this does not imply that teachers should shy away from ‘correcting’ their learners. When a reverent teacher believes that a learner is moving away from the ‘greater possibility’, he or she must ‘correct’ as a matter of necessity. In reverent teaching,

commonplace correction emerges out of a reverent grasp of greater possibilities (Rud & Garrison 2012:8).

A final example of how Schweitzer's philosophy can find practical expression in the classroom concerns the role of silence. Reverence in teaching often occurs through silence. According to Schweitzer (1939):

we do not have enough inwardness, we are not sufficiently preoccupied with our own spiritual life, we lack quietness; and this is ... because in our exacting, busy existence it is difficult to obtain. (p. 43)

In educational practice, for any relation between student, teacher, and subject matter to flourish, teachers must somehow find a way to sometimes silence the noise and busyness of work and everyday life in order to think and reflect. Thinking, in silence, should be the call to action in reverent teaching. Yet, the whole ethos of present-day schools and schooling treats silence with contempt. Michael Dale (in Rud & Garrison 2012:51) effectively illustrates this. He explains that everyone in the school has become obsessed with 'getting'; getting information, getting the right answer, getting a degree, getting through, producing and achieving. Under the influence of the spirit of the time (which is characterised by a utilitarian, calculative rationality and a narrow instrumentality) both teachers and learners are compelled to accept assigned objectives unreflectively. Consequently they only think about the means of achieving these objectives as quickly as possible. In contrast,

silence means turning inward and opening up inner space to be receptive to what lies outside. Reverence requires listening with attentive love followed by reflective thought and an opportunity to be seized by something beyond the realm of man; something beyond understanding and control. Reverent teachers do not fear silence (Boostrom in Rud and Garrison 2012:22).

As previously indicated, Schweitzer expected his philosophy to find practical expression in, and through, education. Although he did not elaborate on the practical implications of his philosophy in an educational context, he did emphasise a number of education-related themes. In the following sections six of these themes that have relevance for current education are identified and briefly discussed. One of these themes is the notion that all individuals have the responsibility to contribute to the development of their own communities and also to that of a world civilisation. This can be interpreted as education for responsible citizenship.

■ Responsible citizenship

According to Schweitzer, education constitutes not only a form of personal development, but also a cultural-political undertaking. It enables learners to develop from self-awareness to self-knowledge and from self-actualisation to social contributiveness (Abrell 1981:294). The ultimate educational objective is societal development. The highly individualistic

ethics which Schweitzer developed were characterised by a strong emphasis on pluralism and personal choice with self-fulfilment at the heart thereof. But self-fulfilment depends on a caring relationships with others (Martin 2015:248).

According to Schweitzer, one does not have to undertake exceptional tasks to serve one's own community and thereby also humanity (Levinson 2009:87). He states that (Schweitzer 1959):

we can all find grace if we seize the chance to act humanly toward those who need another human being. In this way we serve both the spiritual and the good. Nothing can keep us from the ... job of direct human service. So many opportunities are missed because we let them pass by. (p. 35)

Schweitzer argued that the focus of education should be on the development of critically literate, civic-minded citizens. However, he also warned against instilling in learners a rigid nationalism which, according to him, can only lead to catastrophe. In his opinion nationalism of the worst sort was displayed in the two world wars of the 20th century, and he regarded parochial nationalism as one of the greatest obstacles to mutual understanding between peoples. His view that education should take a firm stand in favour of internationalism inevitably brings to mind recent reports that, in order to forge a national identity and to foster patriotism, the South African government plans to spend R34 million on ensuring that the South African flag flies at every school and that learners regularly

(at least twice a day) sing the national anthem (Fick 2014). It also reminds one of calls for an africanisation of the curricula of both schools and higher education institutions in South Africa and an emphasis on indigenous knowledge. This is neither the place nor time to argue the merits of these calls, but it needs to be stated that these calls often reflect unbalanced goals and give cause for concern, because ‘patriotism too often constitutes an euphemism for banal nationalism’ (Fick 2014). Instead, the task of education should be to prepare learners to live in both an African environment and the world of which it forms a part (Msila 2014).

Schweitzer’s view was that, through education, all intellectual and aesthetic resources should be harnessed to develop a world civilisation, the members of which have to live in peace. Education for the promotion of peace amongst all persons and nations is a second important theme which Schweitzer stressed in his teachings.

■ Promotion of peace and non-violence

Schweitzer opposed violence with both words and deeds. According to Barsam (2002:207), his thought in this regard was influenced by Indian religious thought, in particular the Jain principle of ‘ahimsa’, or non-violence. Schweitzer’s recognition of increasing violence in society during his lifetime, and his opposition to counter-violence nurtured a lifelong campaign

for the cessation of all violence. He wrote that ‘all ordinary violence produces its own violence for it calls forth an answering violence which sooner or later becomes its equal or its superior’ (Schweitzer 1957:123).

Schweitzer promoted the idea of combating violence and striving after peace by means of the development of superior reason. In his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech he, for example, declared that (Schweitzer 1954):

man has become superman ... because he not only has at his disposal innate physical forces, but also commands ... the latent forces of nature ... however, the superman suffers from a fatal flaw. He has failed to rise to the level of superhuman reason which should match that of his superhuman strength. (p. 4)

He had hoped that superior reason would result in a change in spirit which would, in turn, have dissuaded educated persons from misusing the power at their disposal. He wrote that ‘whether peace comes or not depends on the direction in which the mentality of individuals develops’ (Schweitzer 1954:6).

Schweitzer’s views in regard to violence and peace served as a base from which new orientations toward human interaction developed and which turned public attention towards the need for improved education.

Within the framework of his overall philosophy, Schweitzer also had very specific ideas about the development of the intellectual capacity of individuals (of rational thought) through education.

■ Intellectual development

Schweitzer was a man with the deepest respect for intellectual thought because he regarded thought as the medium through which answers can be sought to all the questions that plague man. Throughout his life, he regarded rational thought and scientifically grounded knowledge as the foundation for one of the highest responsibilities that can be placed on man, namely reverence for truth. From an early age he believed that ‘if we renounce thought, we become spiritually bankrupt, for anyone who loses faith in man’s ability to discover truth through thought drifts into scepticism’ (Schweitzer 1959:122).

He was not blind to the limitations of science, though, because from a careful reading of his works one can conclude that reverence for truth alerts one to the permanent possibility of error. One should recognise how vulnerable one is to the shifting contingencies of existence and realise that even the most assured position is subject to refutation. One should also critically examine one’s traditions and values. Reverence for reflection, truth, and inquiry is always higher than reverence for a dogmatic assertion of truth (Rud & Garrison 2012:8–9).

Reverence for life demands a proper balance in whatever activities humans engage in. In education it is often assumed that empirical knowledge reigns supreme, and the aesthetic and ethical domains are secondary to experienced knowledge. Schweitzer was highly critical of such a stance. He maintained

that each of these domains deserves equal attention. In fact, he was always concerned with the education of the whole person, calling for the development of both the non-rational and rational self. To him the aesthetic, moral and emotional self were just as important as the intellectual, logical self (Abrell 1974:32).

One of the reasons why people neglected to realise the power of rational thought during Schweitzer's time was because, under the pressures of advertising and consumerism, people found it much more convenient to simply follow the latest trends (Crain 2009:4). Schweitzer so often expressed views pertaining to consumerism (and related concepts such as materialism and bureaucratisation) that education for the purpose of combatting consumerism and materialism can be regarded as a fourth recurring theme in the works and thought of Schweitzer.

■ Influence of materialism and consumerism

Schweitzer held strong opinions on the effects of materialism (a 'way of thinking that gives too much importance to material possessions rather than to spiritual or intellectual things' [Merriam-Webster.com]), which was an evolving trend in his lifetime. He argued that (Schweitzer 1960):

civilisation which develops itself on the material, and not in a corresponding degree on the spiritual side, is like a ship with a defective

steering gear, which becomes more unsteerable from moment to moment and so rushes on to catastrophe. (p. 86)

He acknowledged that progress, as evidenced by materialism, was an essential element in any civilisation, but stressed the importance of an ethical foundation for this phenomenon (Hudd 2005:31).

According to Schweitzer, an imbalance between materialism and spirituality arises when organisations begin to control man's thinking. Consequently, he truly hated the narrowing confines of 'organisation' (Harris 2014:823). He wrote that (Schweitzer 1959):

corporate bodies do not look for their strength in the ideas and values of the people for whom they are responsible. Instead they try to achieve the greatest possible uniformity ... and in this way they hold the greatest power. (p. 224)

He was particularly concerned about the fact that, when a bureaucratisation of organisations takes place, individuals become subservient to organisations to such an extent that they inevitably lose their self-confidence and ability to live in accordance with their own convictions (Hudd 2005:31). In his opinion, individuals should think deeply and independently about the nature of their world and about what was happening in it. This would support their spiritual development and enhance their ability to appreciate the cohesion and mystery of man's existence (Schweitzer 1959:220–224).

Intimately related to materialism is the notion of consumerism. According to Hudd (2005:31) consumerism, or having what

and when an individual wants it, contributes substantially to the idea that personal concerns are paramount. Personal achievement and self-fulfilment are over-emphasised. Reward systems become oriented primarily to individual accomplishment instead of to humanitarianism. In a very practical way Hudd explains, by way of example, one of the effects of consumerism in the educational sphere: learners, she says, come to think less about the educational process. They focus more on the product. Consequently they ask: 'Why must I take Latin (or more often, History) if I will in all probability never use it?' and they insist on knowing: 'How do I benefit from this experience?' as opposed to 'How can I make a difference to my fellow-man?' (Hudd 2005:32). To Schweitzer, the phenomenon of consumerism presented a huge barrier in the way of character development.

A theme that also featured strongly in the philosophy of Schweitzer is environmental ethics, a precursor of modern biocentrism (Yu & Lei 2009:422). He emphasised environmental awareness (and by implication also environmental education) at least half a century before the emergence of the environmental movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

■ Preservation of natural life and the environment

As a child Schweitzer disliked science books that disregarded the fundamental mystery of nature, which he felt is too full of riddles to ever be fully understood (Schweitzer 1959:52).

He was deeply concerned about animals and maintained his love of animals throughout his life. Whilst working in Africa, he did not only rescue a large number of animals, but also sang to them, spoke to them, and made sure that no harm came to even the flies and the bees in his immediate environment (Joy 1967:19). He wrote that man must ensure that he ‘tears no leaf from a tree, plucks no flower, and takes care to crush no insect’ (Schweitzer 1960:310). It is clear that his philosophy was shaped by his experience of nature and of the people he encountered in the rainforest (Harris 2014:823).

As part of his philosophy, Schweitzer offered an understanding of the environment as more than home and neighbourhood. To him, the environment was an organic, living source of all that has value (Rud 2009:949). He placed reverence for each living creature, plant and animal, at the heart of his moral perspective and called it ‘ethical mysticism’ (Schweitzer 1960:79).

To Schweitzer, all life is sacred and interconnected. It creates one huge biosphere. No distinction should be made between ‘high and low’ or ‘valuable and less valuable’ life forms (Yu & Lei 2009:422). Even the organisms that may appear useless and harmful contribute to a delicate balance that, if disturbed, could endanger the lives of the beings considered valuable and useful. Each life is driven by the same urge, the same will to live, and each one of them has an ethical right to life (Cicovacki 2009:19). The logical consequence of these views is that human beings

will sometimes be faced with the dilemma of having to deny other forms of life their will to live, or to destroy life, in order to preserve life. Therefore, he suggested that children be taught that a person sometimes has to injure other lives, but that this should never happen as a result of negligence – only under a necessity that cannot be avoided.

Schweitzer practiced what he preached. According to their testimonies, many doctors and nurses who worked with him at Lambaréné confirm that this well-known little mission station was a model of ecological responsibility (Cicovacki 2009:19). This also applies to pronouncements he has made concerning ethnic relations and the education of colonised people. As an early pioneer in working for the improvement of ethnic relations, he worked specifically in the interest of black people for more than half a century and also attracted people of all nationalities to his jungle hospital (Abrell 1974:30).

■ Ethnic awareness

According to Abrell (1974:30), Schweitzer went to the heart of racial problems long before other men even admitted that there was a problem. Schweitzer understood the mentality of the African people amongst whom he lived and worked. According to Jahn (1953:3), he did not judge them according to his own social customs and moral codes. He, for example, recognised polygamy as a natural consequence of their society. He merely

attempted to assist them wherever he could, taking care that their existing social systems would not be disrupted. From Schweitzer's own accounts of his life in Africa it appears as though he was not a moralising or criticising missionary. Instead, he was a realistic man who was well-acquainted with every aspect of life in the jungle and who focused on providing relief where the suffering was the greatest (Jahn 1953:3).

As early as in 1927, at a time during which the colonial peoples were rarely thought of as even worthy of consideration, he published a declaration of rights in which he emphasised the rights of the African people. He listed and discussed the fundamental rights of the people whom he sincerely believed were entitled to rights. These rights included the right to habitation, free movement over land and waterways, free use of soil, freedom of forced labour and exchange, the right to justice and to live within a natural national organisation and, last but not least, the right to education (Marshall & Poling 2000:228). Schweitzer criticised the colonial authorities for not adequately providing education (if at all) to the local inhabitants of the colonised areas. 'How many educators have you in fact exported to your colony?', he asked. In contrast, missionary societies succeeded in training many artisans, for example, carpenters (Schweitzer 1927 in Joy 1967:171).

Schweitzer proposed limiting the education of Africans to fit what he regarded as 'their economic level' without skipping the

stages between unsophisticated and professional life, namely 'the stages of agriculture and handicraft' (Cho 2011:81). The type of education he proposed for Africans had to be 'a blend of the intellectual and the manual adapted to the needs of citizenship in a primitive society' (Schweitzer 1927 in Joy 1967:172). He emphasised vocational education and therefore recommended that colonial authorities in Europe provide 'not only ordinary teachers, but artisan educators', for 'a central problem of education there is how to make a craft loved and practiced among primitive [*sic*] peoples' (Schweitzer 1927 in Joy 1967:172).

It is important to realise that Schweitzer intended the type of education provided to be fit for its purpose: he repeatedly stressed that 'the beginning of civilisation with [*the local people*] is ... industry and agriculture, through which alone can be secured the economic conditions of higher civilisation' (Schweitzer 1927 in Joy 1967:179). He acknowledged the intellectual capacity of various African intellectuals and often found their level of education to be 'astounding', but he regarded higher education for the local people as superfluous mainly because it did not correspond with the nature of the local economy (Cho 2011:81). He, for example, mentioned that he would hardly be able to compete with an educated local government clerk that once visited him in essay writing. Therefore, Schweitzer held the opinion that schools 'must set their aims higher than is natural' (Schweitzer 1948 in Joy

1967:179), but only once government and trade required employable local people with extensive knowledge. He was concerned about the effect it would have if people were being educated but later found that there was little possibility for them to be employed in a position where they could utilise their knowledge (Schweitzer 1948 in Joy 1967:189).

The six education-related themes that were identified and discussed in broad outline above are certainly not the only ones that can be identified. One could, for example, also conduct an investigation into Schweitzer's views on the use of modern technology; on the role and status of teachers; on religious values and character education respectively; on the relationship between politics and education; or the need for a greater correlation between life and education. However, the brief discussion provided above should be sufficient to substantiate the conclusions that can be drawn regarding the educational legacy of Albert Schweitzer.

■ Conclusion

Although Schweitzer believed that it is the school's task to imbue all learners with the idea of reverence for all things, he offered few practical guidelines to educators on exactly how to do this in practice. In addition, he did not use the modern educational nomenclature. It can, nevertheless, be concluded that he advocated various aspects of education which are

currently stressed by educationists, for example lifelong learning, a focus on both pedagogy and andragogy, holistic education and problem-based learning.

In effect, Schweitzer's whole life was an argument for lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is the 'ongoing, voluntary, and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge for either personal or professional reasons' (Wikipedia Contributors 2015a). This concept indicates that learning occurs throughout life, in various situations (formal, informal and non-formal) and arises from learners' daily interactions with both other people and the world around them. Schweitzer acquired more than one advanced postgraduate qualification, never entirely abandoned his musical or scholarly interests, gave lectures and organ recitals throughout Europe, made recordings, and was a prolific writer of books and articles in addition to his work as jungle doctor for almost half a century. Schweitzer not only advocated lifelong learning in theory, but set a perfect practical example in this regard.

It should also be clear that Schweitzer extended education into the field of the andragogic. Andragogy refers to the education of adults. In particular, it involves a type of education that focuses on academic learning through reflection, critique and historical analyses. No better example of pleas for the use of these processes can arguably be found than in Schweitzer's work.

Holistic education comprises a desire that education should be geared towards a balanced development of learners. In addition to intellectual development, aspects like learners' emotional, social, physical, artistic, creative and spiritual potential should also be emphasised. In holistic education the cultivation of a learner's personal emotions, attitudes and motivations are particularly important, more so than, for example, preparing learners to become productive participants in the economic system (Miller 2005). Holistic education is based on the premise that individuals find identity, meaning, and purpose in life through their connections to the community, to the natural world and to humanitarian values such as compassion and peace. It calls forth an intrinsic reverence for life and a passionate love of learning (Kuriakose 2013:228). These pronouncements may well have been taken from the writings of Albert Schweitzer who advocated these ideas at least seven decades before the concept 'holistic education' became popular in America in 1979.

From the nature of the various themes that Schweitzer emphasised, it can be concluded that he would probably have supported a school curriculum based on real-world problems as well as a problem-based teaching strategy. It is maintained that in traditional, 'content-based learning' teachers are expected to provide learners with a vast amount of information which seems irrelevant to the world as it exists outside of school, and

then to test learners' ability to recall those facts via memorisation. In contrast, problem-based learning is characterised by an emphasis on challenging, open-ended and context-specific problems which do not have simple 'right' or 'wrong' answers. Teachers act as facilitators of learning and merely guide the learning process whilst promoting an environment of inquiry. Learners need to act as self-directed, active investigators and problem-solvers in small collaborative groups. Advocates of problem-based learning believe that this form of learning not only develops critical thinking and creative skills, but also helps learners to learn how to apply knowledge in new situations (Learning-Theories.com 2016).

Albert Schweitzer expressed many ideas on these and other problems during his lifetime; ideas that are, to a large extent, consonant with present-day educational thinking. The relevancy of his pronouncements for current educational theory and practice can therefore hardly be questioned. He undoubtedly 'deserves a wide hearing and sober consideration' (Clark 1962:vii).

However, Schweitzer's greatest contribution to mankind is his philosophy of reverence for life. This philosophy permeated all the (education-related) pronouncements he has made. It prompted him to devote his whole life in sacrificial service to his fellow-men. This philosophy still provides scholars with much food for thought. Educationists can benefit considerably

more from a study of the philosophy of reverence for life, than from seeking short-term answers to the problems of education in Schweitzer's works.

■ Chapter 10: Summary

Albert Schweitzer did not write any books that primarily deal with educational theory or practice. However, his works contain powerful observations regarding education-related matters. The main purpose of this chapter is to highlight salient aspects of what can be regarded as the educational thought of Albert Schweitzer. The chapter also intends determining the relevance of his ideas for current educational practice. A brief explanation of what Schweitzer's famous philosophy, reverence for life, comprises, is provided followed by examples of how this dictum can possibly find expression in educational practice. It is asserted that reverent teaching is the spiritual dimension of classroom practice. It is characterised by mutual respect between educators and learners, an approach to the subject matter that reveals admiration for inherited wisdom, and a teaching strategy that nurtures the seeds of growth in learners within a pleasing class atmosphere. A reverent teacher's management of classroom discipline and utilisation of silence to enhance learning are stressed. Thereafter, six recurring, education-related themes in the works of Schweitzer are identified and briefly discussed, namely education for responsible citizenship and the promotion

of peace; the nature of sound intellectual development; the negative influence of materialism and consumerism; and education for environmental and ethnic awareness. It is concluded that the relevance of the ideas that Schweitzer has articulated lies in the fact that, without employing the modern nomenclature of educationists, he advocated aspects of education such as lifelong learning, a focus on both pedagogy and andragogy, holistic education and a problem-based approach to education. More important, though, is that a sound philosophy (of education) is an irrefutable prerequisite for effective teaching and learning.

Views on religious healing: Albert Schweitzer and Africa

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■ Background and aim

African Christianity offers a variety of religious healing. The so-called mainline churches⁷⁹ focus on *diaconal healing* by supplying members with food packages and hospices, whilst Independent Churches assist their members to find jobs and start businesses. The charismatic and Pentecostal churches excel in *faith healing*,

79. Reformed Churches, Roman Catholic Church, Methodist Church, Congregational Church, Baptist Church, Presbyterian Church

using the laying on of hands, prayer and a deep faith commitment from the side of the believer to heal emotional and physical illnesses. The African Independent Churches complement faith healing with *ritual healing*, employing a variety of cleansing rituals that may be closely related to traditional African practices to assist their members in combatting ill health and ill fortune whilst retaining a strong element of charismatic practices (Landman 2008:14–23). At present, newly formed charismatic churches offer a mixture of prosperity gospel, miracle guarantees, faith and ritual healing that changes the face of Christianity to such an extent that charismatic and Pentecostal churches do not want to be called ‘charismatic’ anymore, but call for a new name that would separate these churches from those understood to be charismatic or Pentecostal.

It will be argued in this essay that Albert Schweitzer (1875–1975), who founded and ran a hospital in Lambarene in the north of the Congo, or rather French Equatorial Africa (now Gabon) in Western Africa at the beginning of the 20th century, practiced a form of diaconal healing, motivating his action from religious conviction. It will furthermore be indicated that, in spite of little evidence, his relationship with the African Traditional Religions which were dominant in his time was strained and that he showed relatively restricted sympathy for contemporary African beliefs on sickness and health.

Ultimately, it will be argued that Schweitzer did not see healing as religious at all. His motivation to come as a healer to

Africa was religious, but healing itself was, in his view, a purely scientific enterprise.

Healing in Africa, then and today, is big business, which gives power to the healer and hope to the believer. Since the National Census in South Africa no longer retrieves information on religious affiliation, it is difficult to make accurate statistical analysis on the movement of believers between churches. However, based on information given to the author by the Bureau for Market Research at the University of South Africa, 26% of believers between 2000 and 2005 left mainline churches which do not offer faith and ritual healing to join the healing churches. This author's research (Landman 2008:14–23) may even indicate that South African Christians are more than 100% religious in that they belong to more than one church; the one offers traditional diaconal healing and food benefits, whilst the other offers faith and ritual healing.

In this regard, and to illustrate this point, a quick reference can be made to the story of Petunia (pseudonym). Petunia is a church council member of a Reformed Church. When her grandchild became sick, she took the child to an independent healing church, believing that somebody had placed a curse on her for which her grandchild had to suffer. Without knowing that Petunia was under the supervision of a healing church, the minister of the Reformed Church took the grandchild to a medical doctor, paying for the consultation and the medicine.

Within two weeks the three month old wound of the grandchild was healed. Petunia was outraged and scared, confronting the minister. The child was now healed, she said, but what about the curse that had not been addressed which would now return with extra force?

This short story of Petunia, then, illustrates the difference in approach to healing between the Reformed tradition which regards secular medical help as a tool in religious practice, whilst a more indigenous approach regards healing as the holistic restoration of body-in-relationship which, in itself, is a religious approach.

Healing in Africa, past and present, being so important, this essay will deal with the healing practices of Albert Schweitzer in his African context within the following framework. Firstly, the main influences on his childhood will be briefly described. Secondly, his attitude towards the traditional African healing discourses and practices of his day will be retrieved from published sources. Thirdly, the research of the author on tradition-modern ways of healing in African Christianity will be overviewed, to come to a conclusion on how Africa has decided what Christian healing is in comparison with Schweitzer's views more than a century ago.

■ Childhood influences

‘As far back as I can remember, I was deeply troubled by the amount of misery I saw in the world’. In these words,

translated from the German and spoken by (Fredric March as) Albert Schweitzer in a documentary on his life made in 1957,⁸⁰ Schweitzer defined his adulthood from his memory as a child.

This narrative captures the first of the main influences on Schweitzer's life, a life that later became well-known for its compassion and reverence for life. In the film he refers to a prayer he, as a boy, composed for himself to pray after he has performed the prescribed prayer before going to bed. The prayer was: 'Dear God, protect and bless all being that breathe, keep all evil from them and let them sleep in peace'. Complementary to this, he narrates an important visit he often made from Mülhausen where he attended secondary school:

Until the Second World War there stood on the Champ-de-Mars at Colmar a monument of Admiral Bruat. On this monument there was the sculpture of an African, carved in stone, with a thoughtful and sad expression. Whenever we went to Colmar, I sought an opportunity to look at him. His face spoke to me about the misery of the 'dark continent'. It was he who directed my childish thoughts to distant lands. (n.p.)

The second major influence which directed his life since childhood was one of both exclusion and belonging. As a

80. The film *Albert Schweitzer* was directed by Jerome Hill and Erica Anderson, and won the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature for 1957.

child he was isolated by his peers as being ‘different’, whilst a sense of belonging was given to him by his parents, who allowed him to think freely and differently: ‘We lived harmoniously together because our parents supported us in all things, even when we were stupid. Our parents brought us up to be free’.

The third prominent feature of his childhood is a strong sense of religious calling. He tells how, as a boy, he was forced to shoot a bird with a slingshot. The moment he refused to do so the church bells started ringing – like a voice from heaven, confirming his calling to revere life. Throughout the said film, Schweitzer refers to the ringing of church bells as a prophecy to his calling to devote his life to pastor-hood, science and music. When he and his wife departed from his childhood town to Africa, again the occasion was marked by the ringing of church bells.

Although the film is a romantic version of his life given by an aging Schweitzer and pronounced in hindsight, it confirms the thesis of this chapter, namely, that Schweitzer came to Africa as a medical doctor in answer to a religious call supported by his compassion for life and suffering; however, the execution of his healing practice was ‘scientific’ and not viewed by him as religious at all, something that might have placed him in conflict with the African Traditional Religions of his time as we shall examine below.

■ Schweitzer's views on religious healing

■ Medicine without politics or religion

In a paper, 'Medical Practices at Albert Schweitzer's Hospital in Lambarene, Gabon, 1913–1965',⁸¹ Tizian Zumthurn⁸² argues that Schweitzer deliberately kept his hospital in Lambaréné free both from the religious missionary attitudes of other European doctors to Africa that demanded an integration of religion and medicine, and the 'public healing' sentiments of contemporary Europe that requested medicine to be part of the 'development' of Africa.

Schweitzer's hospital, Zumthurn points out, was organised well within old-fashioned hierarchical power relations. Ironically, the power and hierarchy functional in Schweitzer's hospital were in line with the contemporary (albeit slightly later) warnings of French philosopher Michel Foucault (1928–1984) against hierarchy and control in medical and mental institutions as expressed inter alia in his *The birth of the clinic* (1963/1973):

There was a clear hierarchy, wherein Schweitzer was the clear boss, whose short tempered character was feared, but his authority, experience and 'wisdom' never challenged. The few doctors mainly performed surgeries. The European nurses were assisting and/or in charge of specific wards and almost half of them worked in the household.

81. Given at the Postgraduate Medical Humanities Conference in Exeter, Great Britain (20 July 2015).

82. From the Institute for the History of Medicine at the University of Bern, Switzerland.

The African auxiliaries worked for them, which adds a layer of power that is very complex, also because these auxiliaries are difficult to trace in the sources, but acted as interpreters. The degree of control, especially when it comes to auxiliaries, but also patients (at some point some of them were put behind bars), was considerable, supervision a constant concern. It is a persistent trope in Schweitzer's writings that is connected to his idea of the civilising mission. It was more focussed on manual work than on conversion to Christianity. (n.p.)

Zumthurm furthermore indicates that, in the about 100 000 letters Schweitzer wrote, 'there is a striking lack of references to the outside world. Local politics, beliefs and customs, as well as the economy are missing in the sources'. Schweitzer indeed distinguished himself from other missionary doctors to break the contemporary strong bond between medicine, religion and politics (Zumthurm 2015):

This seems especially true for Gabon, where Joseph Tonda, Florence Bernault and John Cinnamon all demonstrate how local power aspirations, prophetic movements, and fetish therapeutics were and are intertwined. Schweitzer seems to have been very good at keeping all these things out of the hospital. (n.p.)

In short then, Schweitzer's hospital was based on hierarchy and punishment and rested on a philosophy that medicine must remain pure from politics and religion.

■ Schweitzer on African traditional healing

With this basic insight from Zumthurm, we now move to Albert Schweitzer himself who, in his own works, confirmed

his intention to keep his healing activities strictly apart from both ecclesiastical and secular politics. Schweitzer was not permitted by the Paris Missionary Society, who sent him to Lambarene, to preach at the missionary station. This was because of his 'liberal' views expressed in his book *The quest for the historical Jesus* that was published in 1906. Whether strategically or out of conviction, he made it clear in his autobiographical work, *Out of my life and thought* (1933/1991:78) that his intention in going to Africa was to stay clear of both pietistic and orthodox, as well as liberal, 'Christian inclination'. He wanted to work and not to talk.

Staying clear of faith trends was one thing, but practising medicine in an environment where healing and religious views were closely intertwined should have been quite something else. However, in the rare instances when Schweitzer did refer to traditional medicine, he described his relationship with traditional healers as one of co-operation. Once, and once only, in the regular leaflet he sent to his supporters in Europe (*Mitteilungen aus Lambarene* 1928/3) he wrote:

Unsere Politik geht darauf aus, uns mit den Fetischmännern gut zu stellen, damit sie selber die Kranken, bei denen ihre Kunst versagt, an uns weisen. [Our policy is to be on good terms with the fetish men, so they will send us the patients where their art fails.] (p. 33, [translation])

In *On the edge of the primeval forest*, in which his first stay from 1913 to 1917 is described, Schweitzer (1949:39) furthermore

gave a ‘Stoic’ description of fetishes – with magical power believed to reside especially in the human skull – remarking drily that ‘I am myself the possessor of a fetish’ with reference to the ‘innocent’ skull in his possession.

Under the pretext of being accommodating, Schweitzer (1949), on the contrary, showed with the following remarks precisely how great the distance between his view of scientific medicine and the local religious beliefs on healing was:

My name among the natives in Galoa is ‘Oganga’, that is fetishman. They have no other name for a doctor, as those of their own tribesmen who practise the healing art are all fetishmen. My patients take it to be only logical that the man who can heal disease should also have the power of producing it, and that even at a distance. To me it is striking that I should have the reputation of being such a good creature and yet, at the same time, such a dangerous one! That the diseases have some natural cause never occurs to my patients: they attribute them to evil spirits, to malicious human magic, or to ‘the worm’, which is their imaginary embodiment of pain of every sort. (p. 27)

In short, then, Schweitzer came to Africa not to preach but to practice medicine. When confronted with traditional culture-religious practices and beliefs, he simply accommodated them in a patriarchal way to either minimise or use them to his own benefit. However, he regarded local practices that were not directly related to medicine – such as polygamy and *lobolo* [the paying of a bride-price] – with sympathy (Schweitzer 1949:93). In his own eyes, then, Schweitzer’s relationship with the black people – including the ‘fetishmen’ – was that not only of co-operation, but of brotherhood (1949:95).

■ Voices on Schweitzer as healer in Africa

Although Albert Schweitzer himself wrote very little on his encounter with African Traditionalists, references to this can be found in books written on him in the 1940s through to the 1990s. These books honour his life work in his old age or commemorate his death in 1965. A majority of the books were written by professionals who worked with him in Lambarene, or friends who paid the hospital a visit and bathed in his fame.

The authors presented Schweitzer either as being in harmony with his cultural context, or as the one who came to kill the witch doctors, or then, per definition, Satan himself. At the end of this section, it will be asked whether Schweitzer would have felt at ease with either of these depictions.

Richard Kik, who shared a friendship with Schweitzer for 30 years, published in 1959 a book on his visit to Lambarene entitled *With Schweitzer in Lambaréné*. He describes an incident of doctor-patient-assistant encounter as follows (Kik 1959):

The sick woman is led before the Doctor and he motions her to a seat. 'Oganga', she moans, 'here sits the worm'. With trembling hand she points to her chest. The Doctor does not understand her dialect and gestures to his black assistant, Joseph, who acts as interpreter ... 'Ha, the worm is the sickness in the chest the pain' ... Schweitzer strokes the old woman's hair. She looks at him with anxious eyes as he applies a stethoscope. She is a willing patient. She is given a white powder in a small envelope. Joseph explains to her and her two daughters slowly and carefully how often she must take it, and how much at a time. 'She must not dust her hair with this valuable powder

nor throw any of it away', says Joseph with a stern look and a warning forefinger. (p. 32)

The woman is a willing patient. She does not defy her tradition to come to *Oganga* [fetishman], that is, Schweitzer-as-fetishman. He also does not ask her to do so. He is not a missionary. Schweitzer shows care and strokes her hair. Joseph, the indigenous assistant, gives her medicine and warns her not to use it for ritual practices but to drink the powder. Schweitzer's concern is not her conversion and not her 'development', but that she will take the medicine and be healed, thereby buying into his type of healing.

Kik (1959) describes another scene in which Schweitzer's care and efficiency win the fight against 'the superstition' of the worm. However, here Kik puts Christian missionary words in Schweitzer's mouth to acknowledge that he and his wife came to Africa because the Lord has called them:

Doctor Schweitzer begins his day with the rising sun. His first walk leads him to the most seriously ill. 'Have you slept?' is his first question as he moves through long rows of cots in the simple building which he has constructed for the patients to shield them from sun and rain. Joseph, interpreter and assistant, accompanies the Doctor. Now they are beside the patient who is scheduled for his operation. The young Negro is moaning with pain and pressing both hands over his abdomen. There is no time to lose. The Doctor sends Joseph to call Mrs. Schweitzer who will administer the anaesthetic. Schweitzer gently strokes the forehead of the groaning boy while Mrs. Schweitzer arranges the instruments ... (the operation is performed and the patient taken to the recovery room) ... Joseph tiptoes out of the room. Out in the open

under a palm tree he sees a cowering figure. She is the mother of the patient ... Tearfully she grasps Joseph's hands and asks, 'Where is he? Is he dead?'

Joseph shakes his head slowly. 'Yes, he is dead but the Doctor will awaken him and then he will have not worm ...'

Inside the hut the patient moves his head, opens his eyes and looks around in surprise as he sees the Doctor seated beside him. His lips form the words, 'I have no more pain!' With a smile of calming assurance the Doctor strokes the dark kinky head. The Negro's hand seeks that of the Doctor and holds it.

Led by Joseph the mother enters the sickroom. Joy and thankfulness transform her face. Albert Schweitzer tells them that he and his wife have been chosen by our Lord to help people in Africa: 'All of us, black people and white people, are brothers!' (p. 100–101)

We do not know whether Schweitzer indeed said that 'he and his wife have been chosen by our Lord to help people in Africa', which would not only have been missionary language but also the language of those who wanted to 'develop' Africa through Christianity. We also do not know whether Schweitzer indeed described the hold that 'witchcraft' had on the indigenous people in the following words, attributed to him by his visitors Charles R. Joy and Melvin Arnold, who published a book on their visit to Lambaréné in 1948, entitled *The Africa of Albert Schweitzer, with him in his forest hospital in Lambarene as told in text and pictures by two recent visitors*:

Europeans will never be able to understand how terrible is the life of the poor creatures who pass their days in continual fear of the fetishes which can be used against them. Only those who have seen this misery

at close quarters will understand that it is a simple human duty to bring to these primitive peoples a new view of the world which can free them from these torturing superstitions. (n.p.)

Are these ‘developmental’ words the words of Schweitzer himself, or were they placed in his mouth by visitors who carried with them the European ideals of development through missionary practice?

The same visitors, Joy and Arnold (1948:43), commended the medical assistant Joseph (who will ever know what his real name was?) for becoming immune from witchcraft in spite of the fact that he was ‘indigenous’: ‘He is not afraid of caring for the most violently ill patients and does not fear the Evil Spirits if death should come’. They acknowledged (Joy & Arnold 1948) that he had to attend to his cultural duties but that he did not do so out of free will:

Even those who are liberated from superstition, like this medical assistant, must compromise in their native villages. For example, during a death festival, the enlightened ones usually go through the motions of ‘making tom-tom’, putting food on the grave, and otherwise ‘doing as the Romans do’ so that the more orthodox of their fellow villagers will not feel that the Spirits are outraged. (p. 44)

A decade or two later, in the early 1960’s, Louise Jilek-Aall came from Europe as a psychiatry student to work at Lambarene. In her book, *Working with Dr Schweitzer; sharing his Reverence for Life*, she makes an observation contrary to that of the ‘developmental’ visitors just cited. She relates how she ‘escaped’ one night, against the wishes of Albert Schweitzer, to attend a

traditional feast – where she saw Gustav, the then medical assistant, participating ‘with maddened eyes’. The medical assistant, then, was not somebody participating in a traditional feast as one converted away from ‘heathenism’, but as one forced by his job at the hospital to lead a double life.

Dr Edgar Berman, an American who worked since 1960 with Schweitzer in Lambarene as chief surgeon, also remembered Schweitzer in a way quite differently from that of a man who took the African Traditionalists in his stride. Working with the aged Schweitzer in the five years before his death, Berman expressed great admiration for Schweitzer in his memoirs, which were published in 1986 as *In Africa with Schweitzer: A remarkable memoir of the US Surgeon who worked with Schweitzer*. Yet, he related an incident of intense confrontation between Schweitzer and a fetishman. The latter came into the hospital in Lambarene and gave the patients traditional medicine which were of course alternative to that of Schweitzer. The fetishman furthermore treated Schweitzer with disrespect by calling him (in French) ‘you’ in the singular, not using the required royal plural. Berman (1986:94ff) related at length the anger of Schweitzer against the fetishman, calling him a murderer and forcefully removing him from the hospital.

In South Africa, a country of puritan religious beliefs, Albert Schweitzer was constantly depicted as the one whose Christianity triumphed over the practices of the heathen. One example is

MZ Thomas' *Albert Schweitzer: Van kind tot man* [Albert Schweitzer: From child to man] that was published in 1960 by HAUM. The very first page opens dramatically with Schweitzer saving a baby from being sacrificed by the *toordokter* [witch doctor], an incident never related by Schweitzer himself. This is a book translated from German into Afrikaans and reflects the sentiments of both religious communities that saw Schweitzer primarily as a missionary who came to save Africans from a life-defying heathenism. Even the film *Schweitzer*, made in 1990 by the South African producer Gray Hofmeyr, depicts Albert Schweitzer's life as primarily, and continuously, a dramatic fight between a caring missionary and an evil fetishman. This presentation of Schweitzer is far removed from that of the documentary by Anderson and Hill referred to in the above, in which Schweitzer is depicted in a reverent fight for the healing of misery and pain.

In Schweitzer's own works and words, then, he presented himself as a medical doctor who wished to sail clear of political and missionary agendas in his healing practices. However, those retelling and dramatising him placed words and gestures in his mouth that turned him into a raving missionary with the primary focus of combatting African heathenism.

This author concurs with Barbara Maier and Warren Schibles who, in their book, *The philosophy and practice of medicine and bioethics: A naturalistic-humanistic approach* study Schweitzer's concept of reverence for life and conclude (2011) as follows:

Schweitzer is basically a **humanistic pragmatist** who is coerced to action and involvement to preserve life and health on the basis of his critical and rational understanding and emotions in his concrete situation. (p. 269)

■ African expressions of religious healing

■ African ways of integrating healing with missionary and traditionalist practices

In the last part of this essay, the contribution of Albert Schweitzer to Africa and African views on religious healing is (re)considered. If Schweitzer was a naturalist and a humanistic pragmatist as Maier and Schibles (2011:264) have argued – an insight to which this author subscribes – could Schweitzer have made any contribution to contemporary religious views on healing?

Schweitzer might have chosen a position for himself as a healer in Africa that we today call ‘humanist’ and ‘pragmatist’, but he still had to survive in a milieu which was, on the one hand, pronouncedly missionary Christian at Lambarene and, on the other, hugely African Traditionalist outside. Schweitzer as medical doctor might even have lived in harmony with both missionary Christianity and Africa Traditionalism. Now, more than a century after Schweitzer started his hospital in Lambarene in 1913, the relationship between healing as a religious act, missionary Christianity and African Traditionalism has, of course, changed dramatically.

Vhumani Magezi, in an article entitled ‘Reflection on pastoral care on ministry frontlines in Africa: towards discerning emerging pragmatic pastoral ministerial responses’ (2016), describes the present faces of this relationship. What Magezi describes here, are three types of relationship between Christian and Traditionalists which he presents as ‘pastoral approaches’. Of his seven approaches, only three will be quoted here as relevant to our topic on the relationship between Christian and Traditionalists in acts of physical healing (Magezi 2016):

The first approach entails mixing African traditional practices and Christian pastoral care practices. When problems arise, the leaders, who are the *prophets*, perform rituals to exorcise and cast away the misfortune. They perform healing functions using substances such as water and oil. These prophets operate just like traditional diviners. In fact, there is very little difference between the way diviners and these prophets conduct their care to the people. These practices are prevalent in churches that are commonly called African Independent Churches (AIC), white garment churches or Zionists in South Africa ...

The second approach is one that draws a dichotomy between Christian values and practical life. This approach is not verbalized but rather acted upon by individuals in church communities. In this approach, people tend to hold and adhere to Christian values and virtues when there are no problems or threats to their lives. But in times of problems, in addition to prayers and Bible reading, people seek extra help from diviners and magicians. The people revert to traditional healing practices. This is done in secret (usually at night) in order to maintain one’s position in the church community ...

The sixth [*here: third*] approach is exorcism and healing. Problems and any other of life’s challenges are attributed to curses and evil attacks. Pastoral care entails conducting healing sessions and exorcism. The

pastors pray over protective items such as water, oils, pieces of cloth and arm bands to ensure protection at all times. This approach is prevalent among new emerging Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. (n.p.)

This author (Landman 2008:15ff) acknowledges the following practices in partial agreement with Magezi: (1) African churches openly integrating missionary and traditionalist practices, (2) Christians who belong to mainline ('missionary') churches secretly attending churches that integrate traditionalist practices into traditionally Christian practices, and (3) Christians secretly visiting traditional healers.

This relationship between missionary and traditional is, of course, far removed from Schweitzer's thinking and practice a century earlier, who had to consider only two options, that of 'purely missionary' and 'purely traditionalist' – and rejected both for a humanistic, 'science only' approach, albeit practiced from an hierarchical and patriarchal perspective, as Schweitzer apparently did – which, in a sense, is also very missionary.

This author finds the 2004 categorisation of the healing practices of African churches given by Othusitse Morekwa in a Master's dissertation entitled – appropriately to our topic under discussion – 'The interchange, exchange and appropriation of traditional healing, modern medicine and Christian healing in Africa today', helpful. Here, three types of healing are distinguished:

1. Diaconal healing as practiced by the so-called mainline, or missionary, churches who distribute food packages to people and build hospices and hospitals for the ill.

2. Faith healing as practiced by the charismatic churches when people are believed to be healed through prayer and the laying on of hands.
3. Ritual healing as practiced by the African Independent Churches where ritual cleansing practices as a combination of faith healing and cultural-ritual healing.

This author agrees with these categories except for the fact that they often overlap, and that many of the ‘prosperity churches’ cannot be categorised under these headings.

However, as far as Albert Schweitzer is concerned, this author categorises him and his hospital under ‘diaconal healing’, since he viewed his calling to be from God and he had chosen a missionary context to situate his work.

Local views on religious healing

Albert Schweitzer’s approach that acknowledges the value of both religion and medicine but keeps them apart, probably won the day in hospitals in Africa, but not in present day healing practices in African communities and churches. This final subsection aims to take a glimpse at the integration of healing into religious practices as researched by this author in South African contexts.

During 2003 and 2004, this author interviewed 102 churches in Atteridgeville, South Africa. The latter is a (previously black) township and part of the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality. It is situated to the west of Pretoria, the

administrative capital of South Africa. Of the 102 churches, 54 were mainline churches that practice diaconal healing only, with special reference to the Roman Catholic Church that has built a hospice for people affected by HIV and AIDS in the township, and distribute a large number of food packages weekly. The other 48 churches were healing churches that offered a variety of religious rituals that were claimed to lead to physical and emotional healing and give protection against bad luck and accidents. Many members of the mainline churches visited the prophet-healers of these churches. Every church has its own trademark in healing rituals, but they usually include the cleansing of the inner and outer body through vomiting that is induced by drinking coffee or tea with little stones, and by bathing in ashes that have been blessed by the prophet-healer. A variety of herbs are used as well as praying, the laying on of hands and a sincere call to believe in the healing powers of God and Jesus the Redeemer. Christian *sangomas* will throw the bones on the 'carpet x-rays' to read the future of the believers, with the additional use of bird nests, mirrors, flags or whatever marks the uniqueness of the healer. Other healers inject the sick with detergents to wash their blood clean of HIV and AIDS, or promise believers if they join their specific church they will never be infected by HIV.

In the period 2000 to 2008, this author worked part-time as a therapeutic counsellor at Kalafong, the state hospital in Atteridgeville. Here she met with the religious discourses that

feed these healing practices. The patient population were 75% black, 74% female, and 52% unemployed. Of them 97% were Christian, of which more than half belonged to a church that practiced ritual healing (Landman 2008:12ff.).

The problems that kept patients from developing their potential are – popularly referred to as the three L's:

1. Losses, that is, the loss of relationships through death or divorce, the loss of health through HIV and AIDS, the loss of employment; the loss of youth, etc.
2. Loneliness, which led to entering harmful and risky relationships.
3. Lack of money, and especially a lack of nutritious food.

Some of the religious discourses that convinced patients to visit churches of ritual healing are as follows:

- Illness and misfortune are caused by bewitchment, God or Satan, and the church can heal this.
- AIDS is not caused by a virus, but by bewitchment, God or Satan, and should be healed by the church.
- Medicine alone cannot make you healthy.

In the publication on these findings (Landman 2008), the discourses that encourage patients to see both illness and/or misfortune and health as related to the faith in a specific healer/church, these discourses have been classified as power discourses, body discourses, identity discourses and otherness discourses.

In conclusion to this subsection, a few examples of each are given here:

Power discourses ('Religious discourses as power discourses feed on the binary oppositions between divine and human power, and between divinely instituted hierarchical power and social powerlessness', Landman 2008:103):

- God purifies me through punishment.
- Dreams are divine warnings.
- The pastor said my child died because we do not give enough money to the church.
- My pastor said my depression was a bad spirit.
- I am a man and God has made me so, and therefore I may beat my wife.
- My mother must listen to me; I am the man in the house.

Body discourses ('Religious discourses as body discourses are constituted by the binary opposition between the body as controlled by societal, traditional and divine law versus the body as self-controlled', Landman 2008:103):

- A woman who does not want sex, is a witch.
- Abortion is a sin.
- Masturbation is not for a real man.
- The Lord will condomise me.

Identity discourses ('Religious discourses as identity discourses try to find a place for spiritual identity between the patient's

cultural, sexual, economic, gender and other identities’, Landman 2008:103):

- My church does not allow me to use medicine.
- My church only provides for families, and I am single.
- My church says I must accept that God has made me a woman and poor.
- My church says I am a bad woman because I was raped.
- A good Christian woman does not speak to other men.
- A good Christian man must have a house and be the breadwinner.
- My mother told me to act stupid to get a good husband.

Otherness discourses (‘Religious discourses as otherness discourses emphasise the transcendental nature of religion’, Landman 2008:104):

- My church claims that it is HIV free.
- I think my husband is HIV positive, but God does not want me to deny him.
- My son was killed with a cork opener because God is angry with me.
- The pastor has prophesied that my child, who committed suicide, did not go to heaven.

In short, then, African Christianity today looks much different from the context in which Albert Schweitzer practiced medicine. Schweitzer’s context was that of a white missionary endeavour within a forest of African Traditionalism, with him reacting

against, but also accommodating, both. In the century after Schweitzer, Africa was invaded by a variety of Western Christianity, but eventually took Christianity back from Europe to take control over its own faith practices as diaconal and/or ritual. A majority of African Christianity, as illustrated in the – albeit one – example from Kalafong Hospital in the above, have chosen on a combination between faith and healing. In this regard, Schweitzer is not acknowledged by them as one of their heroes. He was a doctor who assisted Africans, but whose way of doing things do not assist in understanding or enhancing religious healing practices today.

■ Conclusion

Albert Schweitzer's work as doctor in the hospital in Lambarene, Gabon, can be described as diaconal healing, only in the sense that he came and worked as a medical doctor in Africa as a reaction to a calling from God, and has chosen a missionary setup as the context for doing this work. He himself tried – albeit in a patriarchal way – to keep the focus of the hospital away from both European politics and missionary sentiments, as well as from African Traditionalism. For this he has recently been called a 'humanistic pragmatist'.

In this essay, the author has argued this statement from the works of Schweitzer himself as well as from a critical reading of books on Schweitzer written by colleagues and visitors, as well

as works by moralists and film makers in the century after his death.

Finally, it was argued that Schweitzer's division of healing and religion did not win the day in Africa where Christian patients today prefer healing to be in the hands of both the doctor and the church healer. Examples from a hospital in Atteridgeville, where the author worked as therapeutic counsellor, were given, and the discourses that convince patients that healing is a religious enterprise were brought to the table of the researcher.

■ Chapter 11: Summary

African Christianity today entertains several forms of healing, which include combinations of diaconal healing, faith healing, and ritual healing. The latter is also a prime feature of African Traditional Religions which existed prominently in the times of Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965). Physical healing, for a significant number of people in Africa, cannot be obtained by drinking a pill only. Healing does not come from a bottle but from restored relationships and inner cleansing, the latter being effected by appropriate rituals. In Africa, yesterday and today, healing always has a religious and cultural side.

This essay will ask the question on how Schweitzer's views on healing fit into – or stand outside – African views on religious healing. His description of his relationship to the traditional

healers as one of 'co-operation', his 'Stoic' description of fetishes, with magical power residing especially in the human skull (he drily remarked that he too has a fetish), and his sympathetic references to polygamy and bride-price will be examined as well as other expressions of his relationship to black identities.

Ultimately, it will be asked whether he acknowledged religion and culture to be aspects of healing, and if not, how he dealt with the religious and cultural discourses of his patients on health and ill-fortune.

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This book on the legacy of Albert Schweitzer contextualises this remarkable intellectualist, humanist, medicine man, theologian and Nobel Laureate. It emphasises Schweitzer's reverence for life and demonstrates how this philosophy impacts on moral values. From an African academic perspective the book maintains that Schweitzer's philosophy and ethics are rooted in the biblical notion of humankind as image of God (*imago Dei*) and in the African humanist values of the preservation and protection of life. These ethics represent a critique against the exploitation of the environment by warring factions and large companies, especially in oil-producing African countries. The book shows how Schweitzer's ethics were influenced by the Second World War and his sentiments against nuclear weapons. It elucidates the values promoted by Schweitzer, who strove to follow in the footsteps of Jesus in a modern worldview. In his portrayal of Jesus, Schweitzer focuses on his interaction with the poor and marginalised. Schweitzer's philosophy on the reverence for life prepares the way for Christians everywhere to 'think green' about human life.

Professor Andries G. van Aarde, Chief Editor, AOSIS Scholarly Books

'Two perceptions cast their shadows over my existence. One consists in my realization that the world is inexplicably mysterious and full of suffering; the other in the fact that I have been born into a period of spiritual decadence of [hu]mankind ... To the question whether I am a pessimist or an optimist, I answer that my knowledge is pessimistic, but my willingness and hoping are optimistic. I am pessimistic in that I experience in its full weight what we conceive to be absence of purpose in the course of world-happenings. Only at rare moments have I felt really glad to be alive. I could not but feel with a sympathy full of regret all the pain I saw around me, not only that of [humankind] but of the whole creation ... From this community of suffering I have never tried to withdraw myself. It seemed to me a matter of course that we should all take our share of the burden of pain which lies upon the world.'

Excerpt taken from Schweitzer, A., [1933] 1949, *Out of My Life and Thought: An Autobiography*, pp. 254, 279, 280, transl. C.T. Campion, Henry Holt, New York

