

# BILINGUALISM IN THE WORKS OF ALBERT SCHWEITZER AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR AFRICA

**Julius Gathogo**

Kenyatta University, Mombasa Campus  
 Research Institute for Theology and Religion  
 University of South Africa  
 jgathogom@yahoo.com

## ABSTRACT

Through the use of historico-analytical design and an extensive review of literature, the article sets out to demonstrate Albert Schweitzer's bilingualism and how it stirs the language policy debate in twenty-first century Africa. Despite coming from a region of which 92 per cent of the population spoke German, Schweitzer was both a German and a French scholar. Why did he choose to settle in Gabon, a French-speaking colony, even though there were historical rivalries between Germany and France? Why did he choose to go to Africa as a missionary under the auspices of the Paris Missionary Society? And why did he communicate his theological and theo-philosophical discourses in both German and French? Was his bilingualism a product of colonial domination, assimilation, acculturation, and/or cultural diffusion? Did the 26 constituent territories that formed the German empire have a common language? Did Otto von Bismarck's politics, which culminated in the German unification of 1871, affect Schweitzer's use of language? Did the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71 do so? Was Alsace-Lorraine affected by the French assimilation policy? And can his bilingualism inform Africa in light of Jesse Mugambi's recommendation regarding a reformulated language policy? Bilingualism undoubtedly has a number of cognitive benefits over monolingualism, as each of the languages has an influence on the function of the other. Equally undoubtedly, the choice of language is critical in any academic or social discourse, as it is the vehicle for communicating people's cultures, fears, hopes, norms, etiquette, and aspirations. It is not out of conjecture that the renowned novelist, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, argues that a renaissance of African languages is an essential step in the restoration of African wholeness. Indeed, while language use is influenced by the environmental factors around us, it is vital to modify it depending on the situation and/or context.

**Keywords:** Bilingualism; reconstruction; renaissance; assimilation policy; acculturation; reformulation of language policy in Africa



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## INTRODUCTION

Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965) was a German, and later French, theologian, organist, philosopher, physician, and medical missionary in Africa. He is also acknowledged for his historical work on Jesus. He received the 1952 Nobel Peace Prize for his philosophy of “reverence for life,” expressed in many ways. However, he is most famous for founding and running the Albert Schweitzer Hospital in Lambaréné, Gabon, west central Africa (then French Equatorial Africa). As a music scholar and organist, he studied the music of the German composer Johann Sebastian Bach and influenced the organ reform movement (*Orgelbewegung*) (Schweitzer and Joy 1947). He was born in the province of Alsace-Lorraine, one of the 26 territories that made up the German Empire, variously referred to as the German Reich, the Second Reich, or Imperial Germany (See, for example, Chickering 2014; Torp and Müller 2011; Retallack 2008; Hull 2005) – the historical German nation state<sup>1</sup> that existed from the unification of Germany in 1871 to the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II in November 1918, when Germany became a federal republic.

At the time of Schweitzer’s birth in 1875, the majority of the 26 territories which constituted the German empire were ruled by royal families. There were four kingdoms, six grand duchies, six duchies (five after 1876), seven principalities, three free Hanseatic cities, and one imperial territory (See, for example, Chickering 2014; Torp and Müller 2011; Retallack 2008). While most of the population and most of the territory of the empire were located in the Kingdom of Prussia, the Prussian leaders were supplanted by leaders from all over Germany, and Prussia itself played a lesser role. Her three largest neighbours were all rivals: Imperial Russia to the east, France to the west, and Austria-Hungary to the south-east. Austria and Prussia were the largest and most influential states before the German unification of 1871 under Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898) (Lamberti 2001).

## JUSTIFICATION

There is a strong justification for considering bilingual scholarship in Albert Schweitzer’s works and its relevance for Africa. First, Schweitzer was no ordinary scholar; he was a great scholar, who made a mark in his day and, indeed, in some of the darkest days in world history. In both the First and Second World Wars Germany and her allies were pitted against France and her allies (Peacock 1987). Second, as a missionary, Schweitzer chose to go to Africa under the banner of the Paris Missionary Society. He went to Gabon, a French colony where French was widely spoken, and where his bilingualism easily found its expression. Third, while some of Schweitzer’s publications were written in his mother tongue, German, they were later translated into English or French. These

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<sup>1</sup> A nation state is a geographical area that can be identified as deriving its political legitimacy from serving as a sovereign nation.

include his autobiography, *Zwischen Wasser und Urwald* (1921), *Aus meiner Kindheit und Jugendzeit* (1924), *Briefe aus Lambarene, 1924–27* (1928), and *Aus meinem Leben und Denken* (1931) (Wikipedia n.d.). Fourth, Schweitzer's use of both German and French holds vital lessons. These include the notion that theological discourses should not necessarily be confined to one language, as it is the ideas that are articulated and the context in which theology is done that are the key issues. Certainly, language is a vital tool. Not only is it a means of conveying ideas, but it forges friendships, cultural ties, and economic associations. Moreover, as noted by Edward Sapir (1884–1939), an American anthropologist-linguist widely considered to be one of the most important figures in the early development of linguistics, language is not just a vehicle for the expression of the views, insights, attitudes, and values characteristic of a community; it also embodies fundamental expressions of social identity. In Sapir's words (1921, 6), "the mere fact of a common speech serves as a peculiarly potent symbol of the social solidarity of those who speak the language."

Numerous scholars have reflected on the importance of language. One of these is Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897–1941), an American linguist, who was of the view that language shapes thoughts and emotions, thus determining one's perception of reality. Whorf (1937) wrote, "We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native language." The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because "they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscope flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds – and this means largely by the linguistic systems of our minds." John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), an influential British social and political thinker of the mid-Victorian period, said (1862): "Language is the light of the mind." In Africa, with all its cultural complexity, the use of language deserves consideration, as language retention helps people maintain a sense of cultural kinship. Schweitzer's bilingualism thus cannot go unnoticed, particularly as Africa wrestles with the issue of reformulating language policy in the twenty-first century.

## ENCOUNTER WITH FRENCH

Schweitzer considered himself French, although he was a German living in a French colony. Having been born and brought up in Alsace-Lorraine, his home language was an Alsatian dialect of German. Having studied protestant theology at the Kaiser Wilhelm Universität in Strasbourg, in his home province of Alsace-Lorraine, he proceeded, for his doctoral degree, to the Sorbonne in Paris, where he wrote his dissertation on the religious philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Did his Paris experience help him see French as his other language? He had previously, in 1893, played at Saint-Sulpice in Paris for the French organist Charles-Marie Widor (1844–1937), a composer and teacher. His 1898 doctoral programme therefore marked a return to Paris, the capital city of France (See Joy 1953 for details).

In a speech delivered on 10 December 1953 on the occasion of the awarding of the Nobel Peace prize to Schweitzer, Jahn Gunnar (1953), the then Chairman of the Nobel Committee,<sup>2</sup> had the following to say:

Albert Schweitzer was born in Alsace in 1875, a few years after this province had become part of the German Empire. He has seen Alsace reincorporated with France, overrun by the Germans during the Second World War, and then once again reunited with France. Having grown up in this border country, Schweitzer has from an early age known three languages: the dialect of Alsace, High German, and French. His upbringing has also given him a deep insight into both French and German cultures.

Schweitzer was born at a time when a number of languages were spoken in the German empire. These included German (which was spoken by 92% of the overall population of 56 million people); Polish (5%); French (0.4%); Masurian (0.25%); Danish (0.25%); Lithuanian (0.19%); Kashubian (0.18%); Wendish (Sorbian) (0.16%); Dutch (0.14%); Italian (0.12%); Moravian (0.11%); Czech (0.08%); Frisian (0.04%); English (0.04%); Russian (0.02%); Swedish (0.02%); and Hungarian (0.01%). Other languages that were spoken by about 0.03% of the total population included Spanish and Portuguese (Kitchen 2000, 214). In the East African context, most people speak at least three languages, namely Kiswahili, the regional language; one's mother tongue; and English, the language used in the former British colony. Nevertheless, most scholars will write in English only. Schweitzer compares well in this regard, speaking French as a second language.

Considering that he was a German speaker by virtue of being born a German, my interest is drawn to his other language, French. I cannot help but wonder why he did not choose Polish as his second language, since it was spoken by 5 per cent of the overall population of about 56 million. In my view, it is worthwhile to retrace his background historically and consider several factors. First, the modern history of Alsace-Lorraine was largely influenced by the rivalry between French and German nationalists. This drives us to consider the causes of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 to 1871, which are deeply rooted in the events relating to German unification. In what came to be known as the War of 1870, a conflict arose between the Second French Empire and the German states of the North German Confederation led by the Kingdom of Prussia. Prussian chancellor Otto von Bismarck planned to provoke a French attack in order to draw the southern German states of Baden, Württemberg, Bavaria and Hesse-Darmstadt into an alliance with the Prussian-dominated North German Confederation (Taylor 1988, 80–83).

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2 Schweitzer was unable to leave his work in Africa to attend the ceremony at which the Peace Prize for 1952, which had been reserved in that year, was awarded. It was, however, accepted on his behalf by the French ambassador, M de Monicault, who read a message from Schweitzer expressing his gratitude for being thus honoured, his regret at not being able to attend, and his intention of visiting Oslo the following year.

France had since the Middle Ages<sup>3</sup> sought to attain and preserve its “natural boundaries,” namely the Pyrenees to the south-west, the Alps to the south-east, and the Rhine River to the north-east. This strategic aim led to the absorption of territories located west of the Rhine River. What is now known as Alsace was progressively conquered by Louis XIV in the seventeenth century, while Lorraine was integrated in the eighteenth century, under Louis XV (Encyclopaedia Britannica n.d.).

German nationalism, which arose following the French occupation of Germany, sought to unify all the German-speaking populations of Europe into a single nation-state. As various German dialects were spoken by most of the population of Alsace and Moselle (northern Lorraine), these regions were coveted by the German nationalists. In the words of Heinrich von Treitschke, German nationalist, historian and politician, in 1871 (cited in Craig 1980, 12): “We Germans who know Germany and France know better what is good for the Alsatians than the unfortunates themselves. In the perversion of their French life they have no exact idea of what concerns Germany.”

## LANGUAGE AND ACCULTURATION

Such encounters could certainly have contributed to Schweitzer’s interest in French as his other language, and in turn hints at the power of acculturation that is also seen in postcolonial Africa – a phenomenon where “dominant” cultures and/or languages “conquer” or influence “weaker” cultures and/or languages. If we accept that language is the vehicle of culture, language and culture will always work together. Certainly, acculturation explains the process of cultural and psychological change that results from a meeting between cultures (Sam and Berry 2010, 472). Jesse Mugambi defines acculturation as the process through which a subject people assimilates the values of a dominating culture through the means of colonial education, administration and economy. He contends that the African sense of beauty has been distorted and deformed by values and influences that were imposed upon the African cultural heritage (Mugambi 2003, 46). This was done through colonial and neo-colonial domination. According to John Berry, there are four categories of acculturation:

**Integration** – this occurs when individuals are able to adopt the cultural norms of the dominant or host culture while maintaining their culture of origin. Integration leads to, and is often synonymous with, biculturalism.

**Marginalisation** – this occurs when individuals reject both their culture of origin and the dominant host culture.

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3 In European history, the Middle Ages, or Medieval period, lasted from the fifth to the fifteenth century. The various names for the period between CE 500 and 1500 – the Dark Ages, the Middle Ages, and the Medieval Era – all reflect its position between the cultural achievements of the Roman Empire, which fell in 476 CE, and the flourishing of art and science during the Renaissance, which began around the 1400s.

**Assimilation** – this occurs when individuals adopt the cultural norms of a dominant or host or invading culture in place of their original culture. Full assimilation occurs when new members of a society become indistinguishable from members of the other group.

**Separation** – this occurs when individuals reject the dominant or host culture in favour of preserving their culture of origin. Separation is often facilitated by immigration to ethnic enclaves. (Berry 1997, 10)

As noted by Gathogo (2008), Africa's socio-religious discourses were systematically suppressed in pre-colonial times, especially after the Berlin Conference of 1884 to 1885, at which Africa was divided up among a number of European powers "whether the prospective subjects liked it or not." Britain, Belgium, Portugal, Spain and Germany "divided Africa into segments according to their liking, thereby creating their respective spheres of influence." This affected the languages that Africa now spoke. Equally, cultural orientations were greatly affected, with effects that we continue to see.

Mugambi (1995, 220) traces the history of Africa's economic crisis back five hundred years, to the time when Europeans started penetrating its hills and valleys, mountains and plains, deserts and forests, and states that it reached its climax at the Berlin Conference. Mugambi refers to this Conference as a "crisis operation" which was occasioned by Germany's interest in having a niche in the power structure of a rapidly industrialising Europe. Chancellor Otto Von Bismarck was pivotal in this strategy (Mugambi 1995, 220). Consequently, England and France acceded to Germany's demands for African territories, "even though they could have rejected them without serious adverse consequences" (Mugambi 1995, 220). As has been shown earlier, Germany's sovereignty over its African colonies was taken away as part of war reparations following their defeat in the First World War.

The constitutional settlements signed at independence in London, Paris and Lisbon respectively tied the newly independent African nations to their former colonial masters in special relationships, such that Africa remains divided into the four commonwealths, as was the case during the colonial period. These were:

1. The British Commonwealth (Anglophone)
2. The French Commonwealth (Francophone)
3. The Portuguese Commonwealth (Lusophone)
4. The Arab Commonwealth (Arabophone) (Mugambi 1995, 214)

For Mugambi, these colonial legacies are maintained and sustained through preferential trade and cultural agreements, which discourage African countries from opting out of their respective clubs (Mugambi 1995, 214). He writes:

Thus, the link with the metropolitan centre is considered more beneficial than the development of markets within the African continent, and sometimes, outside the respective commonwealths. The emergence of Japan, China, South Korea, India and other Asian countries as competitive trading partners in some African countries is a welcome relief, but in the long term, Africa

will have to develop its internal markets for raw products, manufactured goods and service industries. (Mugambi 1995, 214)

Apart from French prowess with regard to assimilation, another possible reason for Albert Schweitzer's bilingualism in his academic discourses in a predominantly German-speaking region is the effect of cultural diffusion. Cultural diffusion is a phenomenon where cultural beliefs and social activities diffuse through different ethnicities, religions, nationalities and so on, largely unconsciously, following the interaction between cultures or languages. In such circumstances, people find themselves behaving, talking or acting like their counterparts; in such reciprocal arrangements, each culture easily and unconsciously borrows from the other (Smith 1933). Examples of cultural diffusion can be seen in Nigerian Afro-Cinema films, where audiences from various parts of Africa, particularly Kenyans, tend to repeat certain phrases or to speak in Nigerian-accented English. Another example is the way American slang is used in other countries after audiences have been exposed to it through American films.

Diffusionism as an anthropological school of thought which gained currency in the mid-nineteenth century as a means of understanding the distribution of human culture across the world was an attempt to understand the nature of culture in terms of the origin of culture traits and their spread from one society to another (Beals and Hoijer 1965, 664). As Robert H. Winthrop notes, versions of diffusionist thought included the belief that all cultures developed from one culture centre (heliocentric diffusion); the more reasonable view that cultures originated from a limited number of culture centres (culture circles); and finally the notion that each society is influenced by others, but that the process of diffusion is both reliant and capricious (Winthrop 1991, 83–84). It may be defined simply as the spread of a cultural item from its place of origin to other places (Titiev 1959, 446). A broader definition explains diffusion as the progressive shift of distinct culture traits from one society to another through migration, trade, war, or other contact (Winthrop 1991, 82).

Schweitzer's bilingualism can be traced to the French occupation of a number of German territories (such as his native province of Alsace-Lorraine); bilingualism acquired in such circumstances does not simply terminate with the end of "colonisation" and the resultant domination. A similar situation obtains in the Prussian province of Posen, which had a large Polish population. During the Franco-Prussian War there was strong support for the French, and angry demonstrations marked news of Prussian–German victories— a clear manifestation of Polish nationalist feeling. As the Polish identified with France, interest in knowing French became a matter of course (Clark 2006, 579). Likewise, in Alsace-Lorraine, rivalry between French and German nationalism could have left Schweitzer leaning towards either the French or German language. It is no wonder that he finally went to settle in French Equatorial Africa (now Gabon, where he was buried in 1965 upon his death at 90). In view of this, Jahn Gunnar, the then Chairman of the Nobel Committee, sought to paint a picture of Schweitzer as a

citizen of the world rather than of Germany, France, or Gabon when at the presentation of his Nobel Peace Prize on 10 December 1953 he said:

But Albert Schweitzer will never belong to any one nation. His whole life and all of his work are a message addressed to all [humanity] regardless of nationality or race. This is not to say that Schweitzer does not, like most of us, bear the stamp of the home and the country of his childhood and youth ... Albert Schweitzer's initial stay in Africa was, however, short-lived. When the First World War broke out in 1914, he was placed under surveillance as a German citizen, and in 1917 he and his wife were brought back to an internment camp in France... When Schweitzer was released from internment in 1918, he was ill, and he stayed on in Europe until 1924. Since that date he has been living in Africa, leaving only to take an occasional trip to Europe; and during the years between 1939 and 1948 he never left at all. Indeed, he is there now [1953].

A study of Schweitzer's bilingualism leads us to appreciate that from the second half of the twentieth century some of the francophone African countries began to switch to English. These include Rwanda, Burundi, and Gabon. Gabon was under French domination from 1885, and under colonial rule French became the official language of Gabon. In 2012, Gabon changed its official language from French to English. In the era of colonialism in Africa, indigenous languages were ploughed under. A study of Schweitzer's bilingualism therefore leads us to consider how the colonial situation undermined the indigenous languages in tropical Africa. One may well ask why in the twenty-first century English is taking precedence over both French and local languages. This again takes us back to the power of language and acculturation, and one can also consider whether economic factors play a significant role in the reformulation of language policy. For example, does the rise of China as an economic giant make her language more widely spoken globally? This indeed stirs up the debate on language policy in postcolonial Africa, as various African countries engage with the issue of language policy reformulation. As already mentioned, Gabon, Rwanda, and Burundi are switching to English. Kenya has in the twenty-first century added Kiswahili as its second official language after English, while Uganda is struggling to add Kiswahili as the second national language. Likewise, South Africa and other African nations are struggling with the reformulation of the language policy. Should Africa adopt English, Zulu, Afrikaans, Kiswahili, and/or French as the common language for all? Apart from cultural and economic factors, what are the other contributing factors that are critical in the reformulation of the language policy?

## LANGUAGE POLICY REFORMULATION IN TROPICAL AFRICA

In propounding his postcolonial theology, Jesse Mugambi contends that aesthetic reconstruction will inevitably include a "reformulation of language policy, so that Africa evolves a lingua franca through which the peoples of the continent can affirm



a common identity, culture, and future.”<sup>4</sup> He borrows from the work of Mazrui, who cites Tanzania as a country that has deliberately formulated and implemented an indigenous language policy to unite its people. Hence, Kiswahili is used as the language of instruction, administration and socialisation. He goes on to explain that Kiswahili is taught in Ghanaian universities, and concludes that Kiswahili could be the lingua franca of the whole continent.<sup>5</sup>

Ngugi wa Thiong’o, the well-known Kenyan novelist, dramatist and essayist, in his *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance*, traces Africa’s fragmentation and restoration amidst the global history of colonialism and modernity. For him, Africans in Africa and in the diaspora were subjected to the same erasure of all that preceded European conquest and colonisation. He sees similar patterns among other cultures, with the Irish and Native Americans being just two examples. Language therefore becomes critical in reconnecting conquered people to their respective cultures. In his quest for a revitalised Africa, he argues that a renaissance of African languages is an essential step in the restoration of African wholeness.<sup>6</sup> He stopped writing in English in the 1970s in favour of African languages, specifically Kikuyu and Kiswahili, and ponders whether an African renaissance, following the dark ages of colonialism and apartheid, would be expressed in European languages. His foremost concern has therefore been the critical importance of language to culture. As he explores Africa’s historical, economic and cultural fragmentation by slavery, colonialism and globalisation, Europhonism, the replacement of indigenous names, languages, and identities with European ones, reveals itself as a constant and irrepressible force the result of which he envisages to be the dismemberment of African memory.<sup>7</sup>

In proposing Kiswahili as a language for Africa, Mugambi contends that more than 100 million people in East and Central Africa already speak it, and he stresses that it is now time to respond to Nkrumah’s call to evolve a single language to unite the peoples of Africa. He goes on to explain that Kiswahili is a strong candidate because of its affinity with Arabic, and the Arabic related languages of tropical West Africa, such as Hausa and Fulani. It is no wonder that Nkrumah introduced Kiswahili as a subject at the State University of Ghana (Mugambi 2003, 40).

In countering the critics of a continental (African) language, Mugambi (2003, 41) reminds us that, “if Africans can learn European and Asian languages, why should they find it difficult to learn African languages?” He goes on to cite the example of African refugees who are able to adjust to the countries in which they take refuge. Mugambi

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4 Mugambi, *Christian Theology*, 41.

5 Ibid, 50.

6 Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2009).

7 See also Joseph McLaren, “Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s Moving the Centre and its Relevance to Afrocentricity,” *Journal of Black Studies* 28, no. 3 (January 1998): 386–397.

(2003, 41) feels that post the Cold War it is now possible for such initiatives to succeed owing to the fact that there is less foreign-induced suspicion and suppression. However, Mugambi fails to point out the problems associated with regional languages in the face of globalisation. Equally, Mugambi does not point out the risks of pursuing a Black aesthetic revolution and reconstruction. For example, Kwame Nkrumah's promotion of Black aesthetics went to extremes in his subversion of the Apostle's Creed:

I believe in the Convention People's Party (CPP), the opportune saviour of Ghana and in Kwame Nkrumah, its founder and leader, who is endowed with the Ghanaian spirit, born as a true Ghanaian for Ghana; suffering under victimisation, was vilified, threatened with deportation; he disentangled himself from the clutches of the UGCC;<sup>8</sup> and the same day he rose victorious with the "Veranda Boys"; ascended the political heights, and sitteth as the supreme head of the CPP. (quoted in Abban 2004, 80)

In view of the foregoing, the pursuit of Black aesthetics must be addressed cautiously, as failure here can be cataclysmic in nature. Hence, it is important to learn from Nkrumah,<sup>9</sup> who considered himself to be the Black Messiah to both Ghana and Continental Africa as a whole. Indeed, he went too far when he proposed that Ghana and Africa must "first seek the political kingdom and all other things will be added unto" them, to paraphrase the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:33 (Abban 2004, 79–81). Hence, while the choice of language is critical in any human endeavour, it should not be treated as the panacea for all African problems, as Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Jesse Mugambi appear to impute. While renaming African nations, mountains, rivers, trees, lakes, oceans, airports, stadiums, streets and valleys in African indigenous languages may appear to be a significant step forward towards the decolonisation of the mind, more responsible leadership in all sectors of society is in fact the real key. An African renaissance in the twenty-first century can best be achieved through a responsible citizenry and a conscientious leadership, and not merely through a shift from one language to another.

## CRITIQUING SCHWEITZER'S WORK

Although his bilingual works provoke us to think constructively about the critical issue of reformulating language policy in postcolonial Africa, Schweitzer has drawn his own share of criticism. In particular, his critics wonder whether his "reverence for life" philosophy merely meant accommodating African people in or adapting them to the

8 UGCC refers to the United Gold Coast Convention, the political party that Nkrumah defected from before he formed his Convention People's Party (CPP).

9 According to Apollo Milton Obote, first prime minister and later president of independent Uganda, Nkrumah had good ideas about Africa, but his impatience impeded their implementation. He was nevertheless an illustrious leader the like of which Africa has not seen again. Nkrumah thought African, governed African, lived African and died African.

(See <http://www.monitor.co.ug/specialincludes/ugprsd/obote/ob040710.php/>.)

schema of Western civilisation and culture as an indirect way of telling them to abandon theirs. Did it mean inviting Africans to share a few scraps of Western civilisation, like Lazarus who fed on the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table in Luke 16:21? Was he conscious that the French assimilation policy was colonialist and extreme to the core?

From an e-mail interview with renowned African theologian Jesse Mugambi on 1 April 2015 it emerged clearly that Schweitzer made an enormous contribution in the service of God and humanity, but that many ambiguities remain, particularly with regard to his concern for Africa. In Mugambi's view, Schweitzer discovered penicillin.<sup>10</sup> While acknowledging this as a great service to humankind, Mugambi wondered why the drug was tested on Schweitzer's "junior brothers," and not on his own brothers! Did he treat Africans as "brothers" or as "guinea pigs"? In contrasting Schweitzer with Ludwig Krapf, a pioneer German missionary in East Africa, Mugambi explains thus:

Krapf was old enough to be Schweitzer's grandparent, yet Krapf (1810–1881) was much more progressive! In terms of vision, Krapf was much more of a visionary than Schweitzer! Krapf learned Kiswahili, and within a few years after arrival at Mombasa he was writing the Kiswahili Grammar, Kiswahili Dictionary and also translating the Bible into African languages. Although Krapf did not call Africans his "brothers," he became one of us by empathizing with us! Kiswahili became a Lingua Franca of Eastern Africa because of the pioneer work of Krapf! His wife and child are buried in our soil making him truly one of us. (E-mail interview with Prof. Jesse Mugambi)

In this, Mugambi fails to appreciate that Krapf and Schweitzer were products of different historical periods, and that each made a unique contribution. An East African, Mugambi may perhaps be biased against Schweitzer, who ministered only in West Africa, whereas Krapf pioneered Christian missions in East Africa (see Gathogo 2009). Nevertheless, Mugambi's concerns help us see Schweitzer in another light, even though his contributions in Africa cannot be gainsaid, even in the twenty-first century. As we focus on the reformulation of language policy in postcolonial Africa, and as we focus on reverence for life as opposed to the inhumane behaviour exhibited in April 2015 in the xenophobic attacks in Durban and Johannesburg, South Africa, one cannot fail to see ubuntu (humanness) in his contributions to human progress in Africa.

## CONCLUSION

This article has considered Albert Schweitzer's bilingualism in his theo-social and theological discourses, and its relevance for Africa. Through historico-analytical design, it has explored historical factors such as the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 to 1871, which could have influenced his bilingualism. Other critical considerations are

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10 There is another theory to the effect that Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin in 1928 though it appears that more research needs to be done.

acculturation, assimilation, cultural diffusion, adaptation, a confluence of history and/or mere coincidence. Of the 26 territories that emerged after the German unification of 1871, Schweitzer's home province of Alsace-Lorraine was one of those most affected by French influence, providing insight into his use of the French language. Clearly, his decision to settle in Gabon, a French-speaking colony, and his decision to come to Africa as a missionary under the banner of the Paris Missionary Society, despite being a German, inspire us to appreciate his bilingual trajectory. Indeed, Wikipedia describes him as being more inclined to French than German in his discourses, and that he considered himself "French and wrote mostly in French." (Wikipedia n.d.)

With regard to his theology as a whole, especially his reverence for life, I consider him a contextual theologian who compares well with African theologians on both sides of the Atlantic such as Kwame Bediako, Bolaji Idowu, Harry Sawyerr, Lamin Sanneh, Ngindu Mushete, Kä Mana, Manas Buthelezi, John Mbiti, Gabriel Setiloane, John Pobee, Gwinyai Muzorewa, Christian Gaba, Canaan Banana, Laurenti Magesa, Charles Nyamiti, Musa Dube, Musimbi Kanyoro, James H. Cone, and Mercy Oduyoye. Despite his imperfections he was a theologian who was not afraid to face contextual issues such as health, language, racial divides and other socio-economic issues. Schweitzer's bilingualism resonates well with Jesse Mugambi's quest for language policy reformulation, particularly in his aesthetic reconstruction of Africa, despite the latter appearing to reverse the gains of globalisation. As we consider Albert Schweitzer from the vantage point of the present, we acknowledge that he remains as relevant as when he was engaged in his life's work, and his thoughts provoke us to think as deeply today as he did in his time.

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