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**Dr. Albert Schweitzer, a renowned medical missionary with a complicated history**

Health Jan 14, 2016 8:30 AM EDT

His 1931 autobiography, “Out of My Life and Thought,” describing much of his work in Africa, was an international best-selling book. In 1952, he won the Nobel Peace Prize.

Albert was born in 1875 in Kaysersberg (Alsace-Lorraine), Germany, (now Haut-Rhin, France), only two months after Germany annexed that province from France, as a result of winning the Franco-Prussian war. His father, a Lutheran pastor, moved the family to a nearby town, Gunsbach, which was situated in the foothills the Vosges mountain range.

As a boy, Albert was frail in health but robust in intellect and talent. He took to playing the organ as soon as he was big enough to reach the pedals and amazed all who listened to him. The doctor never entirely left the pursuit of music and became well known as a virtuoso on the keyboard and pipes, especially when he played the works of Bach.

Albert entered the Kaiser Wilhelm University of Strasbourg at age 18. There he studied theology, philology, and the theory of music. He progressed to studying for his Ph.D. in theology in 1899 at the Sorbonne, where he focused on the religious philosophy of Immanuel Kant. The University of Tubingen published the dissertation that resulted in 1899.

Philosopher and musician Dr. Albert Schweitzer, sitting at his desk in a London restaurant, around 1955. Photo by Hulton Archive/Getty Images

In 1905, he decided to take up a call from the Society of Evangelist Missions of Paris to become a physician and help them advance their cause and work. The following year, 1906, (and despite pleas from his family to pursue his religious studies) a 31-year-old Albert began medical school. He received his M.D. in 1913 with specialization qualifications in tropical medicine and surgery. His medical dissertation was titled, “The Psychiatric Study of Jesus.”

In June of 1912, he married Helene Bresslau (the daughter of a professor of history at Strasbourg). Helene took up nursing to help her husband in his pursuits; later, she became skilled at delivering anesthesia to the patients on whom Albert would operate. On Good Friday of 1913, the couple set sail, at their own expense, from Bordeaux to Africa. Once in Lambaréné, he established a small hospital at a station set up by the Paris Missionary Society. It was about 200 miles away from the mouth of the Ogooué River at Port Gentil (now Cape Lopez).

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The maladies the Schweitzers treated were both horrific and deadly. They ranged from leprosy, dysentery, elephantiasis, sleeping sickness, malaria, yellow fever, to wounds incurred by encounters with wild animals and many common health problems to which the human body is subject. The living conditions, too, were horrid with makeshift huts for shelter and medical care, hot, steamy tropical days, cold nights, and huge gusts of wind and rainfall.

Schweitzer and his wife did the best they could. In their first nine months in Africa, they treated more than 2,000 patients. In the years that followed, the hospital grew by leaps and bounds, not only in terms of bricks and mortar but also in its delivery of comprehensive and modern health care. By the 1950s, 3 unpaid physicians, 7 nurses and 13 volunteer aides staffed the Schweitzer Hospital. At the time of Dr. Schweitzer’s death, at age 90 in 1965, the compound comprised 70 buildings, 350 beds and a leper colony for 200.

Dr. Schweitzer became especially famous for giving benefit concerts and lectures in Europe as a means of fundraising for his hospital back in Africa. His philosophy, he often stated, was built upon the principle of a “reverence for life” and the religious and ethical imperatives of helping others.

In the early 1950s, as the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki finally settled into the world’s conscience, he joined forces with Albert Einstein, Otto Hahn, Bertrand Russell, and others to urge social responsibility and a ban on the use of nuclear weapons. Lecturing widely on “the problems of peace,” Dr. Schweitzer told his wide audience, “The end of further experiments with atom bombs would be like the early sunrays of hope which suffering humanity is longing for.”

Not all was sunny with Schweitzer’s social commentary. In recent years, many have taken him to task for decidedly paternalistic and racist descriptions of his African patients that would offend many a 21st century observer. For example, he once said, “The African is indeed my brother, but my junior brother.” On other occasions, he opined, “I let the Africans pick all the fruit they want. You see, the Good Lord has protected the trees. He made the Africans too lazy to pick them bare.”

The list, alas, goes on and his prejudices are difficult, if not impossible, to ignore.

Although unacceptable in today’s culture, Dr. Schweitzer’s comments about those he treated were, sadly, all too common during his era, one marked by colonialism, paternalism and racist views. Such comments were, at the very least, a contradiction of his worldview of showing reverence for all human life in both deeds and words.

That said, Dr. Schweitzer did devote more than half a century to practicing medicine in a remote location where few of his colleagues would dare to visit and for people who desperately needed medical care.

A complex man, to be sure, but his humanitarianism did affect the lives of many patients in desperate need of attention and, for the most part, he positively influenced the world in which he inhabited.

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**https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/0114.html**

**Albert Schweitzer, 90, Dies at His Hospital**

Lambarene was where Schweitzer chose to die. "I feel at home here. I belong to you until my dying breath," he told co-workers at the sprawling hospital on his 90th birthday Jan. 14.

His brother, Dr. Paul Schweitzer, 83, was not able to be with him. He is suffering from a heart ailment.

**Reverence for Life**

Man's ultimate redemption through beneficent activity--the theme of Part II of Goethe's "Faust," a metaphysical poem much admired by Albert Schweitzer--threads through this extraordinary man's long, complex and sometimes curious life. With Faust himself he could join in saying:

*...This sphere of earthly soil   
Astounding plans e'en now are brewing:   
Still gives us room for lofty doing.   
I feel new strength for bolder toil...   
The Deed is everything, the Glory naught.*

"You must give some time to your fellow man," Schweitzer counseled in paraphrase. "Even if it's a little thing, do something for those who have need of a man's help, something for which you get no pay but the privilege of doing it."

Also like Goethe, on whose life and works he was expert, Schweitzer came near to being a comprehensive man. He was theologian, musicologist, organ technician, physician and surgeon, missionary, philosopher of ethics, lecturer, writer and the builder and chief force of the famous hospital at Lambarene, in Gabon, the former French Equatorial Africa.

To a marked degree, Schweitzer was an eclectic. Franco-German yet cosmopolitan in culture, he drew deeply from the music and philosophy of the 18th century, especially Bach, Goethe and Kant. At the same time, he was a child of the 19th century, accepting its creature comforts yet rejecting its complacent attitudes toward progress. In line with the 20th century he sought to put religion on a rational footing and to accept the advances of science; yet he was a foe to materialism and to the century's criteria for personal success.

As a person, Schweitzer was a curious mixture. Widely honored with degrees, citations, scrolls, medals, special stamps, even the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1952, he seemed oblivious to panoply. He did not preen himself, nor did he utter cosmic statements at the drop of a cause. Instead, he seemed to many observers to be a simple, almost rustic man, who dressed in rumpled clothing, suffered fools gladly, stated fundamental verities patiently and paternally and worked unobtrusively. In this respect, he was undoubtedly made more of by cultists than he was willing to make of himself, although he was by no means a man with a weak ego.

Some of his more ardent admirers insisted that he was a jungle saint, even a modern Christ. But Schweitzer rejected such adulation; he held that his own spiritual life was its own reward and that works redeemed him.

**In World and In God**

He took the search for the good life seriously. For him it had profound religious implications. "Anyone can rescue his human life," he once said, "who seizes every opportunity of being a man by means of personal action, however unpretending, for the good of fellow men who need the help of a fellow man." He sought to exemplify the idea that man, through good works, can be in the world and in God at one and the same time.

For all his self-abnegation, Schweitzer had a bristly character, at least in his later years, a formidable sense of his own importance to Lambarene and a do-good paternalism toward Africans that smacked more of the 19th than the 20th century.

For example, John Gunther got a dressing-down from Schweitzer for writing that he resembled Buffalo Bill and also, perhaps, for implying that he did not know what was going on in nationalist Africa.

If Schweitzer was thin-skinned to criticism from irreverent journalists, he heard little of it at Lambarene, where his proprietorship was unquestioned. Not only did he design the station, but he also helped build it with his own hands. His co-workers were quite familiar with the businesslike and sometimes grumpy and brusque Schweitzer in a solar hat who hurried along the construction of a building by gingering up the native craftsmen with a sharp:

"Allez-vous OPP! Allez-vous, OPP-opp. Hupp, upp. OPP!"

When Schweitzer was in residence at Lambarene, virtually nothing was done without consulting him. Once, for instance, he all but halted the station's work when he received a letter from a Norwegian child seeking a feather from Parsifal, his pet pelican. He insisted on seeing personally that the youngster got a prompt and touching reply from his own pen before work was permitted to resume. His autocracy was more noticeable as his years advanced and as his medical assistants grew less awesome of him.

Schweitzer regarded most native Africans as children, as primitives. It was said that he had scarcely ever talked with an adult African on adult terms. He had little but contempt for the nationalist movement, for his attitudes were firmly grounded in 19th-century benevolence. Although thousands of Africans called him "le grand docteur," others plastered his village with signs, "Schweitzer, Go Home!"

**Needs Held Elementary**

"At this stage," Schweitzer said in 1963, "Africans have little need for advanced training. They need very elementary schools run along the old missionary plan, with the Africans going to school for a few hours every day and then going back to the fields. Agriculture, not science or industrialization, is their greatest need."

His attitude was sharply expressed in a story he liked to tell of his orange trees. "I let the Africans pick all the fruit they want," he said. "You see, the good Lord has protected the trees. He made the Africans too lazy to pick them bare."

Although Schweitzer's views on Africa were out of date, he did what no man had done before him--he healed thousands and he welded world attention on Africa's many plights. A jungle saint he may not have been; a jungle pioneer he surely was.

Whatever Schweitzer's idiosyncrasies, he constructed a profound and enduring ethical system expressed in the principle Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben or Reverence of Life. It is conceivably the only formal philosophical concept ever to spring to life amid a herd of hippopotamuses.

As Schweitzer recounted this climactic incident, he had been baffled in getting an answer to the question: Is it at all possible to find a real and permanent foundation in thought for a theory of the universe that shall be both ethical and affirmative of the world and life? The answer came in a flash of mystic illumination in September, 1915, as he was steaming up the Ogooue River in Africa.

Late in the third day of his journey he was on deck thinking and writing. "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 has yielded," he went on, "the path in the thicket had become visible. Now I had my way to the idea in which world [affirmation] 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 ideal of civilization, is founded in thought."

Schweitzer's ethical system, elucidated at length in "The Philosophy of Civilization," is boundless in its domain and in its demands. He summarized it once by saying:

"A man is ethical only when life, as such, is sacred to him, that of plants and animals as that of his fellow men, and when he devotes himself helpfully to all life that is in need of help."

"Let me give you a definition of ethics," he wrote on another occasion. "It is good to maintain and further life; it is bad to damage and destroy life. And this ethic, profound, universal, has the significance of a religion. It is religion."

Called upon to be specific about Reverence for Life, he explained that the concept "does not allow the scholar to live for science alone, even if he is very useful to the community in so doing."

"It does not permit the artist," he continued, "to exist only for his art; even if it gives the inspiration to many by its means. It refuses to let the businessman imagine that he fulfills all legitimate demands in the course of his business activity. It demands from all that they should sacrifice a portion of their own lives for others."

**A Guide to Action**

Schweitzer earnestly sought to live his philosophy, which for him was a creedal guide to action. He was genuinely proud of his medical and missionary station at Lambarene. He had scratched it out from the jungle beginning in 1913; he had designed it; he had worked as an artisan in constructing many of its buildings; and, although the station was many times beset by adversities that would have discouraged a less dedicated man, it had grown at his death to more than 70 buildings, 350 beds and a leper village of 200.

The compound was staffed by 3 unpaid physicians, 7 nurses and 13 volunteer helpers. Visitors who equated cleanliness, tidiness and medicine were horrified by the station, for every patient was encouraged to bring one or two members of his family to cook for him in the ditches beside the wards. Babies, even in the leper enclave, dropped toys into the dust of the unpaved streets and then popped them into their mouths. Noisome animals wandered in and out, including Schweitzer's pet parrot (which was not taught to talk because that would lower its dignity) and a hippopotamus that once invaded the vegetable garden.

Lambarene resembled not so much a hospital as a native village where physicians cared for the sick. Actually, Schweitzer preferred (and planned) it in this fashion on the ground that the natives would shun an elaborate, shiny and impersonal institution.

The compound even lacked electricity, except for the operating and dental rooms, and members of the staff read by kerosene lamp. Of course, it had no telephone, radio or airstrip.

Schweitzer's view that "simple people need simple healing methods," however it might have outraged medical sophisticates, won for Lambarene a tremendous measure of native confidence. Thousands flocked there, and thousands responded to Schweitzer's sermons as well as to his scalpel, for he believed that the good shepherd saves not only the animal but also his soul.

Lambarene was suffused with Reverence for Life to what some critics thought was an exaggerated degree. Mosquitoes were not swatted, nor pests and insects doused with chemicals; they were left alone, and humans put up with them. Indeed, building was often brought to a halt lest nests of ants be killed or disturbed. On the other hand, patients received splendid medical care and few seemed to suffer greatly from the compound's lack of polish.

**Critic's Accolade**

Schweitzer's accomplishments are recognized even by his most caustic critics. One of them, Gerald McKnight, wrote in his book "Verdiot on Schweitzer":

"The temptation for Schweitzer to see Lambarene as a place cut off from the world, in which he can preserve "its original forms and so reject any theory of treatment or life other than his own, is understandable when one considers the enormous achievement he has attained in his own lifetime. He came to the Ogooue in 1913 when horses drew the buses of London and leprosy was considered an incurable scourge. Housed originally in the grounds of a mission, he chose to leave this comparative sanctuary for the unknown and forbidding regions of the jungle nearby.

"No doubt a wish to have absolute dominion over his hospital drove him to this course, linked with the inner purpose which had brought him to Africa, but it was nonetheless heroic. Today, the hospital has grown, entirely under his hand and direction, into a sizable colony where between 500 and 600 people live in reasonable comfort. No greater tribute to his abilities as a conqueror of jungle need be cited than the fact--regarded locally as something of a miracle--of his own survival."

Schweitzer came to French Equatorial Africa as a tall, handsome, broadly powerful young man with a shock of rich, black hair, an enormous mustache and a look of piercing determination in his bold eyes. The years thinned and grayed his hair (without making it less unruly); age seamed his face, shrunk his frame, made him appear bandy-legged; time softened his eyes and made them less severe. But determination to make his life an "argument" for his ethical creed was as firm at 90 as it was on his 30th birthday, the day he decided to devote the rest of his life to the natives of Africa as a physician.

Schweitzer's arrival at this decision was calculated, a step in a quest for a faith to live by. It was a search that had haunted him, driven him, since childhood.

Albert Schweitzer was born at Kaystersberg, Haute Alsace (now Haut-Rhin), Jan. 14, 1875, just two months after Germany had annexed the province from war-prostrate France. During that year, his father, a Lutheran pastor, moved his wife and eldest son to the neighboring village of Gunsbach amid the foothills of the Vosges. It was to this picture-book Franco-German village and its vineyards that Schweitzer was invariably to return between periods of self-imposed exile in Africa.

**A Musical Prodigy**

As a child, he was frail and an indifferent student in everything but music, for which he showed the interest of a prodigy. He began to play the church organ at 8, when his feet barely reached the pedals. At the age of 18 he entered the University of Strasbourg as a student in theology, philosophy and musical theory. But this time he had also studied the organ briefly in Paris under the legendary Charles Marie Widor, who was so impressed with Schweitzer's talents that he taught him then and later without fee. Indeed, Schweitzer became a notable organist, especially in the works of Bach.

Schweitzer's university life was interrupted by a year of compulsory military service in 1894, a period that proved crucial to his religious thinking and to his life's vocation. The moment of awakening came as he was reading Matthew x and xi in Greek, chapters that contain Jesus' injunctions to His apostles, among them the one that commands, "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, "freely give"; and the verse that urges men, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

**Why Jesus Cried Out**

Schweitzer was not only struck by the application of these verses to himself, but even more by the over-all content of the two chapters as expressed in Jesus' assertion that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." These chapters started a chain of thought that resulted in "The Quest for the Historical Jesus." Published in 1910, it at once established Schweitzer as an eminent, if controversial, theologian whose explosive ideas had a profound influence on contemporary religious thinking.

Schweitzer depicted Jesus as a child of his times who shared the eschatological ideas of late Judaism and who looked for an immediate end of the world. Jesus, Schweitzer contended, believed himself the Messiah who would rule in a new kingdom of God when the end came; at first Jesus believed that his Messianic reign would begin before his disciples returned from the teaching mission commanded of them in the Gospel according to St. Matthew. When the world's end did not occur, according to Schweitzer's view, Jesus decided that He must undergo an atoning sacrifice, and that the great transformation would take place on the cross. This, too, failed, Schweitzer argued, hence the despairing cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

"The Jesus of Nazareth . . . who founded the kingdom of Heaven upon earth, and died to give his work the final consecration, never had any existence," Schweitzer wrote. "He is a figure designed by rationalism, endowed with life by liberalism and clothed by modern theology in an historical garb."

Schweitzer maintained, nonetheless, that Jesus' concepts were eternal. "In reality, that which is eternal in the words of Jesus is due to the very fact that they are based on an eschatological world-view, and contain the expression of a mind for which the contemporary world with its historical and social circumstances no longer had any existence.

"They are appropriate, therefore, to any world for in every world they raise the man who dares to meet their challenge, and does not turn them and twist them into meaninglessness, above his world and time, making him inwardly free, so that he is fitted to be, in his own world and in his own time, a simple channel of the power of Jesus."

Meantime, as these beliefs were maturing in Schweitzer's mind, he continued his student life at Strasbourg and fixed with great precision the course of his future. In 1896, at the age of 21, he pledged himself that he would give the following nine years to science and art and then devote himself to the service of suffering humanity.

**Wrote on Kant**

In those years he completed his doctoral thesis in philosophy, a study of Imanuel Kant's views on religion; studied the organ, again with Widor in Paris; won his doctorate in theology; was ordained a curate; taught theology and became principal of the faculty at Strasbourg; wrote "The Mystery of the Kingdom of God"; and, at Widor's urging, completed a study of the life and art of Johann Sebastian Bach.

The English version, "J. S. Bach," is a two-volume translation of the German text, itself an entire reworking of the first version written in French. It approaches Bach as a musician-poet and concentrates on his chorales; cantatas and Passion music. Schweitzer presents Bach as a religious mystic, as cosmic as the forces of nature. Bach, he said, was chiefly a church composer. As such, and as a Lutheran, "it is precisely to the chorale that the work of Bach owes its greatness."

"The chorale not only puts in his possession the treasury of Protestant music," Schweitzer wrote, "but also opens to him the riches of the Middle Ages and of the sacred Latin music from which the chorale itself came.

"From whatever direction he is considered, Bach is, then, the last word in an artistic evolution which was prepared in the Middle Ages, freed and activated by the Reformation and arrives at its full expression in the 18th century."

Turning to Bach's nonchurch music, Schweitzer said:

"The Brandenburg concertos are the purest product of Bach's polyphonic style. We really seem to see before us what the philosophy of all ages conceives as the fundamental mystery of things--that of self-unfolding of the idea in which it creates its own opposite in order to overcome it, and so on and on until it finally returns to itself, having meanwhile traversed the whole of existence."

Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier" also drew Schweitzer's warmest praise.

Schweitzer's probing conception of Bach created a sensation in its time, and it still remains a classic study, not only for the detailed instructions it provides for the playing of Bach but also for its challenging esthetic.

True to his pledge, Schweitzer turned from music and theology to service to others. On Oct. 13, 1905, he posted letters from Paris to his parents and friends saying that at the start of the winter term he would become a medical student to prepare himself for the life of a physician in French Equatorial Africa.

This decision, protested vigorously by his friends, was, like so many others in his life, the product of religious meditation. He had pondered the meaning of the parable of Dives and Lazarus and its application to his times, and he had concluded that Dives represented opulent Europe, and Lazarus, with his open sores, the sick and helpless of Africa.

Explaining his decision later in more mundane terms, Schweitzer said:

"I wanted to be a doctor that I might be able to work without having to talk. For years I had been giving myself out in words. This new form of activity I could not represent to myself as talking about the religion of love, but only as an actual putting it into practice."

**Studied Medicine 7 Years**

For seven years, from 1906 until he received his M.D. degree in February, 1913, Schweitzer studied medicine, but he did not entirely cut himself off from his other worlds. Attending the University of Strasbourg, he served as curate at St. Nicholas, gave concerts on the organ, conducted a heavy correspondence and examined Pauline ideas, especially that of dying and being born again "in Jesus Christ." It resulted in a book, "Paul and His Interpreters," published in English in 1912.

That same year he resigned his curateship and his posts at the university and married Helene Bresslau, the daughter of a well-known Strasbourg historian. A scholar herself, she became a trained nurse in order to share her husband's life in Africa.

On Good Friday, 1913, the couple set sail from Bordeaux for Africa, where Schweitzer established a hospital on the grounds of the Lambarene station of the Paris Missionary Society. The society, wary of Schweitzer's unorthodox religious views, had barred him from preaching at the station, but agreed to accept his medical skills.

Lambarene, on the Ogooue River a few miles from the Equator, is in the steaming jungle. Its climate is among the world's worst, with fiercely hot days, clammy nights and seasonal torrents of rain. The natives have all the usual diseases, plus Hansen's disease (leprosy), dysentery, elephantiasis, sleeping sickness, malaria, yellow fever and animal wounds.

From the first, when Schweitzer's hospital was a broken-down hen coop, natives flocked by foot, by improvised stretcher, by dugout canoe to Lambarene for medical attention.

He had barely started to clear the jungle when World War I broke out. He and his wife (they were German citizens) were interned as prisoners of war for four months, then released to continue the work of the hospital. In this time and the succeeding months he started to write the two-volume "The Philosophy of Civilization," his masterwork in ethics that was published in 1923. It is a historical review of ethical thought leading to his own original contribution of Reverence for Life as an effective basis for a civilized world.

Schweitzer's book (and other writings as well) disputed the theory that human progress toward civilization was inevitable. He disagreed sharply with Aristotle's view that man's knowledge of right and wrong would surely lead him to make the right choices. He maintained, instead, that man must rationally formulate an ethical creed and then strive to put it into practice. In Reverence for Life, he concluded, "knowledge passes over into experience."

In 1917, the Schweitzers were returned to France and later to Alsace. To support himself and to carry on the work at Lambarene, Schweitzer joined the medical staff of the Strasbourg Hospital, preached, gave lectures and organ recitals, traveled and wrote. He returned to Africa alone in 1925, his wife and daughter, Rhena, who was born in 1919, remaining in Europe.

In the almost eight years of his absence, the jungle had reclaimed the hospital grounds, and the buildings had to be rebuilt. This was no sooner under way than Schweitzer fell ill, an epidemic of dysentery broke out and a famine set in. The epidemic promoted Schweitzer to move his hospital to a larger site two miles up the Ogooue, where expansion was possible and where gardens and orchards could be planted.

Two physicians had arrived from Europe, and to them and to two nurses he turned over all medical responsibilities for a year and a half while he supervised (and helped) to fell trees, clear ground and construct buildings. The main hospital room and the dispensary were complete when he departed for Europe in midsummer 1927.

He returned to Lambarene in 1929 and remained for two years, establishing a pattern of work in Africa and sojourns in Europe during which he lectured, wrote and concertized to raise funds for his hospital. On one of these occasions, in 1949, he visited the United States and lectured on Goethe at a conference in Aspen, Colo.

**Le Mot Juste**

Hundreds flocked to hear him and to importune him. On one occasion a group of tourists pulled him away from the dinner table to get an explanation of his ethics. He responded with remarkable courtesy for about 20 minutes until one questioner prodded him for a specific application of Reverence for Life. "Reverence for Life," Schweitzer replied, "means my answering your kind inquiries; it also means your reverence for my dinner hour." The tourists got the point and he returned to his meal.

On his trip to Europe, Schweitzer invariably made his headquarters at his home in Gunsbach, which was expanded until it was also a leave and rest center for the hospital staff. On an afternoon, Schweitzer could often be seen leaving his home to slip over to the church to play Bach. (He played Bach at Lambarene, too, on pianos especially lined with zinc to prevent rot.) He not only played throughout Europe, but he also repaired church organs and kept up a ceaseless study of music.

Schweitzer received many honorary degrees and recognition from a number of governments and learned societies. He was made an honorary member of the British Order of Merit in 1955. He was elected to the French Academy in 1951.

After his wife died in 1957, Schweitzer was almost continuously in Lambarene. He celebrated his 90th birthday there as hundreds of Africans, Europeans and Americans gathered to wish him well. Among the messages he received was one from President Johnson. "In your commitment to truth and service," the President cabled, "you have touched and deepened the live of millions you have never met."

Начало формы

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Albert Schweitzer Biography

Albert Schweitzer was a German born French theologian, organist, philosopher, physician, and medical missionary. Check out this biography to know about his childhood, family life, and achievements.

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**Quick Facts**

**Birthday:** January 14, 1875

**Nationality:** French

**Famous: Quotes By Albert Schweitzer Nobel Peace Prize**

**Sun Sign:** Capricorn

**Died At Age:** 90

**Born In:** Kaysersberg

**Famous As:** Philosopher, Theologian

**Spouse/Ex-:** Helene Bresslau

**Father:** Louis Théophile

**Siblings:** Emma Schweitzer, Louisa Schweitzer, Lulie Adele Schweitzer, Marguerit Schweitzer, Paul Schweitzer

**Children:** Rhena Schweitzer Miller

**Religion:** Lutheran

**Died On:** September 4, 1965

**Place Of Death:** Lambaréné

**More Facts**

Начало формы

**Albert Schweitzer As PDF**

Конец формы

Albert Schweitzer was a German born French theologian, organist, philosopher, physician, and medical missionary. His founded the Albert Schweitzer Hospital in Lambaréné, now in Gabon, west central Africa (then French Equatorial Africa). Schweitzer is also greatly known as a music scholar and organist who was a profound scholar of the music of German composer Johann Sebastian Bach. Many of his Bach recordings are currently available on CD. He started and greatly influenced the Organ reform movement. Schweitzer was the founder of universal ethical philosophy and universal reality. He is best known for challenging the secular view of Jesus as depicted by historical-critical methodology present during his time in certain academic circles, as well as the traditional Christian view, depicting a Jesus Christ who saw himself as the world-saving Messiah. He won the 1952 Nobel Peace Prize for his philosophy of “Reverence for Life”. Several films have been made on Albert Schweitzer’s life.

The Early Life

• Albert Schweitzer, the son of an Evangelical Lutheran minister, was born on Jan. 14, 1875, in Kaysersberg, Alsace, which was then under German rule. Albert's early life was both comfortable and happy. Little Albert began his education at the village school, where he studied under Father Iltis until the age of ten, learning a great deal without exertion from him. But even before that he started taking his lessons in music from his father.

When Albert was 10 years old, he went to live with his granduncle and grandaunt in Mulhouse so that he could attend the excellent local school. He graduated from secondary school at the age of 18. During these 8 years he learned directly from his elderly relatives the demanding ethical code and rigorous scholarly outlook of their early-1800s generation. Simultaneously, he studied organ at the Protestant

• In 1893, Albert Schweitzer received his school leaving certificate and entered the Theological College of St. Thomas under Kaiser Wilhelm University, now known as University of Strasbourg, with Protestant theology and philosophy. Simultaneously he also received instruction in piano and counterpoint from Professor Gustav Jacobsthal.

• In 1894, he had to go for his one year compulsory military service. On his return, he resumed his studies in theology and music, concurrently, attending the operas of Richard Wagner, visiting Bayreuth Festival in 1896.

• In 1898, he went to Paris to complete his PhD dissertation at the Sorbonne. Here too he remained preoccupied with music, often meeting Aristide Cavaillé-Coll, a distinguished organ builder and studying music with Charles-Marie Widor and piano with Marie Jaëll.

• In 1899, Schweitzer returned to Strasbourg, where he defended his doctoral dissertation, ‘The Religious Philosophy of Kant’, earning his PhD in Philosophy. Next in 1900, he received his licentiate in theology. By then, he had already started serving as a deacon at the Church of St. Nicholas in Strasbourg.

**Recommended Lists:**

**Theologians**

**Philosophers**

**French Men**

**French Musicians**

**Early Career**

• In 1901, Albert Schweitzer began his career as a provisional principle at his alma mater, the Theological College of St. Thomas; the position was made permanent in 1903. All along, he continued to preach at the Church of St. Nicholas, rising to the post of curate.

• In spite of such preoccupations, music remained an integral part of his life. In 1899, Charles-Marie Widor had asked Schweitzer to write on the great musician, Johann Sebastian Bach.

• Working on the theme, he published ‘J. S. Bach: Le Musicien-Poète’, in 1905. Written in French, the book generated great interest among the German-speaking readers. Instead of translating it, Schweitzer decided to write a new book. Entitled ‘J. S. Bach’, it was published in two volumes in 1908. Meanwhile in 1906, he published another book, this time on organ building and playing.

• Also in 1906, his first theological work, ‘Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung’ (History of Life-of-Jesus) was published, generating immense interest. In 1910, it was translated into English by William Montgomery. Entitled ‘The Quest of Historical Jesus’, it made Schweitzer famous in English-speaking world.

Quotes: Life, Music

**Recommended Lists:**

**French Physicians**

**French Philosophers**

**French Intellectuals & Academics**

**Capricorn Men**

**In Africa**

• It is not known exactly when, but sometime around 1909, Schweitzer gave up his successful career to study medicine at the University of Strasbourg with the aim of serving in Africa. He had declared his intention for such work back in 1905 and had been studying in private since then.

• Working hard, he completed his courses by December 1911, receiving his degree in Doctorate of Medicine in 1912. Meanwhile, he had raised enough money by holding concerts and also from sales of his books to establish a hospital in Africa.

• In the spring of 1913, Albert Schweitzer left for Lambaréné in the Gabon province of French Equatorial Africa, along with his wife, Hélène Bresslau, a trained nurse. There they set up their hospital in a chicken hut on the banks of the Ogooué (Ogowe) River at the edge of the forest.

• Although the funds were scarce and the equipments primitive, they began to treat thousands of Africans, thronging their hospital from far and near. By the autumn of 1913, they had their hospital rooms, which included an operation theatre, made out of corrugated iron.

• In 1914, with the start of the First World War, Schweitzer and his wife, being German citizen on French soil, were put under the supervision of the French military. However, they continued their work until 1917, when he became ill from exhaustion and anemia. Thereafter, they were moved to France.

• The Schweitzers were first interned at Garaison and then from March 1918 in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, before being sent home in Alsace in July 1918. Here he was declared free. Subsequently, he became a French citizen.

• Schweitzer remained in Europe for next six years, raising fund for his hospital in Africa by giving lectures and organ concerts. He also took further medical courses and wrote number of books.

• In 1922, he gave number of lectures in England. From the Dale Memorial Lectures given in Oxford University, appeared two of his important works, ‘The Decay and Restoration of Civilization’ and ‘Civilization and Ethics’. Published separately in 1923, they were later included in ‘Philosophy of Life’ as volume I and II.

• From the series of lectures presented during February 1922 to the theology and missionary students at Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham, appeared another of his important works, ‘Christianity and the Religions of the World’. This too was published in 1923 along with his fourth book, ‘On the Edge of the Primeval Forest’.

• In 1924, he returned alone to Lambaréné. With funds earned from royalties and appearing fees, he immediately set out to rebuild the structure and reestablished his hospital. Subsequently, he also began to receive donations from all over the world.

• By 1925-1926, with other medical staff joining the hospital, it took up the shape of a village, where Schweitzer was not only a doctor and surgeon, but also an administrator, buildings superintendent and pastor of a congregation. Also in 1925, he had his ‘Memoirs of Childhood and Youth’ published.

• In 1927, he went to Europe for two years. This time, he was able to leave behind a more organized hospital and therefore, his staff was able to carry on his work until he returned in 1929.

• In spite of the busy schedule, Schweitzer continued to write, publishing another of his important theological work, ‘The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle’ in 1930.

• In 1931, he published his autobiography, ‘Aus meinem Leben und Denken’ (Out of My Life and Thought).

• In 1932, he returned again to Europe, giving lectures and organ recitals throughout the continent. This was also the time when he possibly restarted editing of Bach’s which he began in 1912.

• Continuing to travel and write, Schweitzer published another of his important work, ‘Indian Thought and its Development’. However from 1937 to 1948, he was forced to remain at Lambaréné, mainly because the ongoing Second World War.

• In 1940, while living at Lambaréné, he had to cross another major hurdle. Because of the war, his European supply lines were cut off. Undeterred, he established Albert Schweitzer Fellowship to unite his US supporters and thus filling up the gap

**Later Years**

• In 1949, Schweitzer traveled to the USA, inspiring his followers to serve the underprivileged. Thereafter, he continued to visit different parts of Europe as long as his health permitted, concurrently expanding the hospital facilities at Lambaréné.

• From 1952 onwards, he started working against nuclear tests and nuclear weapons. In 1957, he gave four speeches over Radio Oslo. These were published in his last book, ‘Peace or Atomic War’. Also in the same year, he co-founded The Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy.

• In his last years, he lived mainly in Lambaréné. By the time he died in 1965, the hospital he had founded in a chicken shed had seventy-two buildings with 600 beds. However, he failed to train local population; physicians and nurses, who worked for him, were all whites.

Quotes: Never

**Major Works**

• Remembered both as a best-selling author and a medical missionary, Schweitzer is best revered for his philosophy of life, whose basic tenet was ‘Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben’. Meaning ‘Reverence for Life’, the phrase struck him like a lightning while watching a family of hippopotamus on the bank of Ogooué River.

• He realized that the Western civilization was in ethical crisis, which in turn is rooted in a crisis of world view. Out of this realization was born his seminal work, ‘Philosophy of Civilization’.

• ’Philosophy of Life’ consists of two volumes, ‘The Decay and Restoration of Civilization’ and ‘Civilization and Ethics’. He later started writing two more volumes, ‘The World-View of Reverence for Life’ and ‘Civilized State’; but they were never completed.

**Awards & Achievements**

• Albert Schweitzer won the 1952 Nobel Peace Prize for his role in promoting world peace. He used the $33,000 prize money to set up a leprosarium at Lambaréné. His Nobel Lecture entitled ‘The Problem of Peace’ is said to be one of the best speeches ever given.

**Personal Life & Legacy**

• On 18 June 1912, Albert Schweitzer married Helene Bresslau, daughter of one of his professors. Soon after their marriage, the couple moved to Africa where they set up their hospital.

• Their only daughter, Rhena, was born in January 1919 in Europe. In 1924, when her father returned to Africa she remained behind with her mother in Königsfeld, her father’s birth place, where he had built their family home.

• During her childhood, she saw little of her father. But much later, she left for Africa and joined her father, taking over the administration from him, a task that she continued to perform even after his death.

• Albert Schweitzer suffered a stroke on 28 August 1965 and died from it on 4 September 1965 in Lambaréné., at the age of 90.

• He was buried at his hospital, later named Albert Schweitzer Hospital. Their home in Königsfeld has now been turned into a museum.

https://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/albert-schweitzer-266.php

The village of Lambaréné lies on the Ogowe River, 40 miles south of the equator in Gabon, formerly French Equatorial Africa.

The area resembles the beginning of the world – clouds, river and forest melt into a landscape that seems unbelievably ancient. Most of the year, the air is like steam coming out of a green mist.

This is the setting of one of the most famous missionary enterprises of the world – the Bush Hospital of Nobel Laureate Dr. Albert Schweitzer.

Albert Schweitzer was born in Kaysersberg, Alsace on January 14, 1875. As a child, he had very poor health compared to his later robustness. As he grew up, his strength increased and he mastered subjects that were particularly difficult for him mainly Hebrew. He had an amazing gift for music and composed a hymn at the age of 7 and began to play the organ at 8 and at 9, substituted for the regular organist in a Church Service.

He studied philosophy at the University of Strasbourg and a thesis on Kant brought him his first doctorate. He studied theology and in 1900, when he was 25, became curate of St. Nicholas Church in Strasbourg.

He studied the theory of music and began his career as a concert organist. By the time he was 26, he had already graduated as a doctor in philosophy, theology and music. He wrote a stream of books on theology and the most famous ones were Reverence for Life and The Quest of the Historical Jesus.

Then abruptly at the age of 30, he abandoned his three careers in order to become a doctor and go out to Lambaréné which was desperately in need of a doctor and rehabilitation. For the rest of his life, he chose to remain there as a medical missionary.

Why did he choose medicine and why Lambaréné of all places?

Because, it was one of the most inaccessible and primitive spots in all Africa and also one of the most dangerous places which needed to be rehabilitated immediately.

Relatives and friends were shocked by his decision and they tried to change his mind, but he told them he felt that he had to give something in return for the happiness he enjoyed in life. What a noble thought!!

Now began his journey into the medical field. Albert Schweitzer studied medicine from 1905 to 1912 and finally at age 38, he became an MD. At the same time, he continued with his teaching philosophy alongside his gruelling medical studies. Adding to that, he started work on a scholarly edition of Bach’s Organ Music, while also giving organ concerts all over Europe. He had matchless energy that surprised all. He married in 1912 and his wife learnt nursing in order to be able to help him in Africa.

When they arrived in Lambaréné in 1913, they found conditions extremely unfavourable. Every inch of habitable land in the area had to be scrapped out of the giant forest which was thickly populated with wild beasts like pythons, gorillas and crocodiles. Dr. Albert Schweitzer built his hospital from scratch literally with his own bare hands. Slowly, he won the confidence of the Africans and the people accepted him as their messiah. The African patients who suffered from diseases like leprosy and elephantiasis were not always easy to handle. His patients were so primitive that they would eat the ointment prescribed for skin afflictions and some of them swallowed at one gulp a whole bottle of medicines that was supposed to last for weeks. At times, they became very hostile and tried to poison other inmates of the hospital. There were numerous hurdles to cross which he did with great patience. He steadfastly persevered and eventually won the faith of these Africans.

In the meanwhile, First World War broke out and because of their German citizenships he and his wife were briefly taken in as prisoners and kept in a camp. But that did not deter him from coming back to Lambaréné once they were released. He was a man of iron determination.

Once back at the hospital, he hired a nurse who acted as the General Manager of the whole establishment and also served as the doctor’s interpreter.

Leprosy was the main scourge of this village. By this time, Dr. Albert Schweitzer was building a new leper village. Patients came from far with their families to get treated. This leper establishment looked like a small native village. There were no paved roads, no running water, no electricity, and no x-ray at all. How the doctor ran his practice and treated the patients successfully is very hard to comprehend.

The main hospital ward was a long one-story structure cut into narrow dark rooms each of which open on a court. The patients lay on wooden bunks covered with matting and their families did the cooking outside the entrance. Dr. Albert Schweitzer’s Leper Hospital was so primitive that there was no mechanism at all for sterilization of bandages. Water had to be boiled in kettles over open wood fires. Drugs and bandages were in short supply. Every safety pin was precious. Things that we take for granted in a hospital were objects of wonder, if they existed at all. As it is these modern gadgets were difficult to maintain in that tropical climate. What was the point in having them if they rotted and rusted within a week. Moreover, the good doctor wanted the Africans to feel comfortable that made them think they were at home.

Life at the hospital centred in a crowded open space. The Africans came and went, squatting on the ground, binding palm fronds for roofing. Others were busy at sewing machines on a veranda and others ironed the clothes. The doctor, apartfrom running the hospital, gave work to everybody and made sure all of them worked diligently. All the nurses were Europeans totally dedicated to the welfare of the Africans. He performed a number of operations and was almost successful every single time. Later, this primitive hospital grew into a huge hospice with many buildings added to it.

The good doctor led a simple life and regularly played on his tiny piano the hymns that he was famous for. He returned to civilization once in a while and lectured widely in colleges and universities. He was bestowed with innumerable honors for his literary contribution. He managed to keep up a steady literary output and was awarded The Noble Piece Prize for 1952. The United States invited him to attend the Goethe Festival in Aspen, Colorado. The Paris Bach Society presented him with a massive piano weighing 3 tonnes which he carried it to Lambaréné. The piano looked so out of place in that primitive surroundings. He lined the pedals with zinc to protect it against the incessant damps and termites.

Without doubt, Dr. Albert Schweitzer was a great man, one of the greatest of this or any time. He was the world’s foremost authority on the architecture of organs as well as one of the most renowned organists. He was a genius who had different careers going at one time, philosophy, medicine, theology and music. He was an expert on aesthetics, tropical zoology, anthropology and agriculture. He was an expert carpenter, mason, veterinary surgeon, boat builder, dentist, draughtsmen, mechanic, pharmacist, environmentalist, gardener and above all the messiah of the downtrodden.

It was no small surprise that he received the Noble Piece Prize in the year 1952. There was no other better person than him.

He died on September 4, 1965, aged 90 at Lambaréné, Gabon.

Ethics is nothing other than **Reverence for Life**. **Reverence for Life** affords me my fundamental principle of morality, namely, that good consists in maintaining, assisting and enhancing **life**, and to destroy, to harm or to hinder **life** is evil.