

## *An Extraordinary Life*

This month marked the 131<sup>st</sup> birthday anniversary of a most remarkable human being. Albert Schweitzer was born on January 14, 1875, into an Alsatian family (Alsace was then part of Germany and later of France) that for generations had been devoted to religion, music and education. His father and maternal grandfather were ministers, and both of his grandfathers were talented organists. When he went to school, he noticed that his family was better off than many of the other families in his village. Over the objections of his parents, young Albert decided after his first day of school, at age six, that he would not wear his more expensive clothes but would dress just like his poorer schoolmates. So began a lifelong interest in the feelings and welfare of others.

Schweitzer earned a doctorate in philosophy degree from the University of Strasbourg, where he also received a license in theology. As a preacher and college administrator, he served with distinction. Musicologist and performer, he also established an international reputation as a concert organist.

Having decided to go to Africa as a medical missionary rather than as a pastor, Schweitzer in 1905 began the study of medicine at the University of Strasbourg. In 1913, having obtained his M.D. degree, he founded his hospital at Lambarene in French Equatorial Africa. In 1917, he and his wife, Helen, were sent to a French internment camp as prisoners of war. Released in 1918, Schweitzer spent the next six years in Europe, preaching in his old church, giving lectures and concerts, taking medical courses and writing books. He returned to Lambarene in 1924 and, except for relatively short periods of time, spent the remainder of his life there.

With the funds earned from his own royalties and personal appearance fees and with those donated from all parts of the world, Schweitzer expanded the hospital to 70 buildings that by the early 1960s could take care of more than 500 patients at any one time. At Lambarene, Schweitzer was doctor and surgeon in the hospital, pastor of a congregation, administrator of a village, superintendent of buildings and grounds, writer of scholarly books, commentator on contemporary history, musician, and host to countless visitors. The honors he received were many, including the Goethe Prize of Frankfurt and honorary doctorates from many universities emphasizing one or another of his achievements. The Nobel Peace Prize for 1952, having been withheld in that year, was given to him on December 10, 1953. With the \$33,000 prize money, he started the leprosarium at Lambarene.

Schweitzer died on September 4, 1965, and – appropriately – was buried at Lambarene.

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His life was a chronicle of his concern and compassion for others, and reflects the choices he made to benefit them instead of himself.

What about you? We may not have the abundance of gifts that God bestowed on Albert Schweitzer, but He did give each of us certain talents unique to us.

And every day, in the centers of Life Care and American Lifestyles and in the work of Life Care at Home, associates are showing their commitment to people in need.

--Beecher Hunter