

Albert Schweitzer was born in Germany in 1875. During a long productive life, he was well-known in several areas, establishing himself as theologian, internationally renowned musician, philosopher and physician. He stood out, however, as a great inspiration to humanitarian movements: at 30 years old, in spite of the secure position he held at a traditional European college and his prestige as a musician and preacher, he turned his attention to Africans of French colonies consigned to oblivion and with no medical aid or care. After reading a publication by the Paris Missionary Society about the urgent need for physicians in Africa, he left everything to dedicate to Medicine.

In 1905, he began his studies, and six years later, already graduated and recently married to a nurse, he moved to Lambaréné, in Gabon. On arriving there, he came across a total lack of resources, but did not get discouraged. He set up an office at a former chicken coop and began seeing patients, ignoring obstacles such as the hostile climate, poor hygiene, different language and shortage of medicines.

This great doctor's life and dedication was an example for many people. He undertook the sublime mission of helping the sick and the needy in one of the poorest African countries. He became famous for his work with leprosy patients. His formation in religion and philosophy led him, in 1915, to the principle he named reverence for life, a universal ethical basis for what he sought when he was at the height of fame and youth.

With the World War I, he was taken to France as a prisoner. He spent almost the whole period of battles confined to an internment camp. Then, he wrote about the decay of civilizations. With the end of the war, he resumed work and, in the face of a collapsed world, declared it was time to start again and direct attention to humanity. He delivered a series of lectures aimed only at raising funds to rebuild his work in Africa.

After spending seven years in Europe, he returned to Lambaréné and expanded the hospital. With the help of a professional staff, the great doctor could dedicate some hours a day to write books, whose income contributed to keep the hospital pavilions.

In 1952, when he awarded the Nobel Peace Prize from the Norwegian Nobel Committee, Schweitzer, who has long worried about the problems the cold war and the atomic weapons could bring to the world, delivered a speech in favor of peace and called attention to the nuclear arms race. He donated the prize money to the hospital in Lambaréné, in order to start a leprosarium. In 1957, he published a world appeal entitled "A declaration of conscience", which became the bible of the antinuclear movement, including for Lord Bertrand Russell and the Pugwash Organization, formed by scientists.

Schweitzer was a deep thinker who, besides his moving and inspiring work, left many thoughts to posterity. About philanthropy, he said that "everyone must find his own Lambaréné. There are no heroes of action, only heroes of renunciation and suffering". With his principle of reverence for life he was the forerunner of current movements to defend the environment and human rights when he wrote: "man's ethics must not end in man, but should extend to the universe. He must regain the consciousness of the great chain of life, from which he cannot be separated. He must understand that all creation has its value. What then results for man is not only a deepening of relationships, but a widening of relationships".

Schweitzer had more than 40 patients a day to treat. In parallel with medical service, he used to spread the Gospel in an appropriate language, giving examples taken from nature about the necessity of acting for the benefit of our fellow men.

He became very famous in all intellectual circles in the continent, and he died at the age of 90, in 1965, in Africa.