



STATEMENT DS140

ALBERT SCHWEITZER

Albert Schweitzer is best known as a great humanitarian because of the fact that he spent his life from age 40 until his death in Africa as a medical doctor at Lambarene. He established a hospital and treated the natives there. As he said at age 40, he "was not going to speak or talk any longer." What he was going to do was to act--to act in behalf of those poor natives who had no proper medical aid. That is one aspect of his life and probably the most well-known.

But before he went to Africa he became widely known for two other accomplishments: one, as a great interpreter of Bach (he wrote a two-volume biography of Bach and was also considered to be the greatest interpreter of Bach on the organ of his day); and also as a theologian. His best-known written work was *Quest of the Historical Jesus*. Unfortunately, that book betrays Schweitzer as less than a Christian theologian. He had tremendous influence on theology, but he certainly did not maintain orthodox Christian theology. He concluded that book with Jesus having brought about His own crucifixion; he also left Christ without a resurrection. Schweitzer's position was that Jesus held the idea that He was the Messiah, that He had a "messianic consciousness" and that He thought He could bring about the end of the world by forcing His own death; that, according to Schweitzer, was His glory. Jesus died as a martyr to His belief in His "messianic character."

Just before Schweitzer's death, he joined the International Unitarian Association, making it perfectly plain that he did not believe in Jesus' deity. This is a great tragedy; but it shows that a person can be a humanitarian without necessarily being a Christian. Many people have been concerned with human need, even though they themselves have not been Christians.

Schweitzer grew up in the Alsace, in France, where a certain brand of mysticism prevailed in earlier centuries called "Rhine Mysticism." People who adhered to that believed in Jesus in some emotional way, but they were schizophrenics. As a result, it did not become part of their philosophy of life intellectually. The irony of this is that Schweitzer went to Africa and taught the natives to sing "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." There were natives who were certainly converted by Schweitzer's own presence there, but Schweitzer himself certainly did not hold, in any intellectual way, to the deity of Christ. Schweitzer is a paradoxical figure, to say the least.

As far as Schweitzer's educational background is concerned, he earned three doctorate degrees at the University of Strausburg in France, in the areas of music, theology and medicine.