

Albert Szent-Györgyi, the Iconic Nobel-laureate Representative of Global Health Ethos

It is hard to find a more relevant symbol figure for the responsiveness, dedication and humbleness of a great natural scientist than Albert Szent-Györgyi. As the son of a typical upper middle class family of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, with professors, musicians, landowners and lawyers, he turned into a medical doctor, with an exceptionally strong motivation and commitment to help others both locally and globally. He faced court martialing because of helping Italian POWs in 1918. The Gestapo hunted him after his heroic diplomatic mission to promote the end of 2nd WW in Central Europe. In 1947 he escaped the communist regime in Hungary, and later became a proponent of the case of the 1956 Hungarian anticommunist revolution world wide. As an US citizen, he raised his voice to provide more finances for biomedical research instead of supporting the war in Vietnam.

His contributions to global understanding of molecular systems (worth the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine 1937), as the identification of half of the citric acid cycle, the fumarate catalyse, isolation of Vitamin C, and later the explanation of molecular systems behind muscle contraction, were all aimed at the unselfish solving of serious problems of mankind. The isolation of vitamin C was not patented, not to hinder the poor to get access to the vital substance. Hans Krebs, who later clarified the whole Citric-acid cycle, and gave his name to it, managed to escape Nazi-Germany with the help of Szent-Györgyi, and finish the work in Cambridge.

In 1964, in the middle of several serious political conflicts, and while struggling with hopeless cancer cases of his beloved, Szent-Györgyi summarized in a wonderful prayer, „Psalmus Humanus” his thoughts about God, fellow people, nature, environment, and responsibility for the future.