

F.B. Meyer by Bob Holman, Christian Focus, Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, GB, 2007. (58 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols.)

1. Life for Christ's Disposal

In his last years, he declared, "If I had a hundred lives, they would be at Christ's disposal." At times it seemed as though he was living a hundred lives. [page 8]

2. England's Suffering Masses

The suffering of the masses is well documented. A few years before Meyer was born, Frederick Engels completed his classic *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. His collection of statistics, his own astute observations and readiness to meet, mix with and learn from poor people enabled him to show that unskilled workers faced grueling work conditions, along with wages too small to allow them to save. When unemployment came, they could not pay the rent nor feed their families. The poorest, if not sleeping on the streets, would be fortunate to have one damp room per family. Children were particularly at risk and in Manchester over fifty-seven per cent of children of working class parents died before they were five. [page 16]

3. A Center for Gathering and Study

The center or hub of the activities was Melbourne Hall. It was open the whole week, not just on Sundays. The traditional gatherings for prayer and Bible study took place there, for Meyer never neglected his responsibility to provide spiritual food for believers. So it did a whole range of educational and recreational activities, with a coffee room opened most evenings. The intention for it was to be a venue where working class men and women would feel comfortable whether they were Christians or not. [page 57]

4. Seeing Those Not Served

[Meyer] He had a nose for spotting new needs, to see people whom the church was not serving.

5. The Use of Baptist Deaconesses

A little known theme of Meyer's ministries was his recognition of the spiritual abilities of women. With rare exception, British churches used women as tea making, flower arranging, and sale of work fodder – although many went to the mission field. Other denominations had recruited women as deaconesses and Meyer and others in the London Baptist Association founded the Baptist Deaconesses Home and Mission in 1890. Historian John Briggs stated, "He was the genius behind the Baptist deaconesses order, which equipped and trained women to give leadership to the churches to engage with the social problems, particularly the absence of medical care, in the inner city. [page 64]

6. No Class Differences Among Christians

[Meyer] He wrote in 1899, “There has been too great a tendency in the present day to relegate work among the poor to Mission Halls, instead of encouraging all classes to meet at least on one day in the week, beneath a common roof.” His vision was of placing outreach and welfare services within the main church. He wanted to break down class differences between Christians, not reinforce them. [page 66]

7. Meyer’s Wife and Family

The church had wanted Meyer to live with walking distance of the church. No doubt, he would have welcomed this but he could not impose this on his wife. Eventually, he installed a bedroom and study with the church and lived there at weekends. Mrs Meyer was never the conventional minister’s wife who ran the women’s meetings. It appears that she was not a regular attender on Sundays. Census records show that their daughter married in 1893 in Hampstead to Edward Charles Tatam, of whom little if anything is known. The Christ Church Magazine of 1894 announced that the Tatams had a son on August 19th at Brighton (they eventually had two daughters as well). Meyer was in the USA at the time and the magazine congratulated him on becoming a grandfather. Strangely, no mention was made of his wife. [pages 72-73]

8. The Gospel and the Prohibition of Alcohol

The Sunday meetings took off. Social issues were raised. For instance, it was agreed to petition the council to start wash-houses in the neighborhood. Then came a fifteen-minute talk, usually by Meyer. Fullerton observed that he seemed to have “almost a dual personality.” On Sunday mornings and evenings, he was the dignified and eloquent ecclesiastic while in the afternoons he was “bluff and cheerful ... challenging the best in the men.” But it was no soft gospel. Meyer preached both the need to find salvation through Christ and the need to give up alcohol. Indeed, one corner of the church was Consecration Corner, for those desiring to become Christians, and one Teetotal Corner, for those wishing to sign the pledge. [pages 78-79]

9. Reaching Alcoholics with the Gospel

At other times, they went on “public house raids”, usually about closing time on Saturday nights and would bring back from forty and fifty drunken people, give them strong coffee accompanied by music from the Brotherhood’s own brass band and then tell them about Jesus. [pages 79]

10. The Benefit Society

In an era when state unemployment benefits did not exist, unemployment due to illness was a constant anxiety. The Brotherhood organized a Benefit Society in which members could contribute small amounts each week and receive help for short periods

when out of work. They could also save money with the Brotherhood to be drawn out later for clothes or a daughter's wedding. Meyer commented, "It is enough to bring tears to one's eyes, to think of many of our men taking their wives and children for a week at Margate, which would have been an impossibility in the old drinking days." The Brotherhood, again probably through Turner, made links with employers and jobs were found for a number of members. [page 80]

11. For Jesus' Sake

Another favorite example of Meyer's he called "The dead canary". The theme at the Brotherhood meeting had been "For Jesus' sake". One man returned to his flat where his favorite canary was dead and his wife in fear of beating. When she told him, he responded, "Well, it can't be helped, it's alright for His sake." When Meyer heard, he sent him the best canary money could buy with a simple note, "For Jesus' sake." [page 83]

12. An Individual Relationship with God

Meyer once wrote, "God does not deal with society as a whole, but with individuals one by one ... not with politics but with principles." He never altered his belief in the important evangelism to ensure that people were brought into an individual relationship with God. He then moved on to argue that the combined efforts of these individuals could set an example which might influence society as a whole. [page 93]

13. Tackling the Menace of Drink

Meyer moved on to collective action whereby pressure was put on local authorities to apply the laws which controlled the sale of liquor and on government to make them more stringent. He was incensed that grocers could obtain licenses to sell alcohol and passionately ask "when will the working men have the right to secure immunity for their wives and families by prohibiting the sale of drink along their streets?" As in Leicester, Meyer joined other ministers in opposing the granting and renewal of some licenses. He considered magistrates, "in their luxurious mansions", who dealt with licensing, to be completely out of touch with the havoc caused by drink. He then campaigned for laws to give local authorities greater powers to control the numbers of pubs. He urged the government to be more pro-active in tackling the menace of drink. [page 94]

14. Closing Brothels

He noted the limitations of rescue work amongst prostitutes and vulnerable young people which hauled a few out of the swamp but did not drain it. Brothels were illegal but any action depended upon complaints from two ratepayers. The local councils of Lambeth, Southwark and Bermondsey, tended to avoid their responsibilities. Meyer,

working through the Central South London Free Church Council, collected facts about the numbers using brothels and put pressure on the authorities to prosecute. He worked closely with police and local councillors while he and his colleagues were prepared to give evidence in court of what they had seen. Meyer's able assistant Turner told how they watched one house for five hours one evening and saw one woman take twenty-three men into it. The result was that up to eight hundred brothels were closed in his years at Christ Church, although Meyer and his team had to face hostility and threats from brothel owners and users. [page 95]

15. Christians in Politics

Importantly, he was stressing that inner holiness was not at odds with outward political actions. Meyer frequently urged Christians to stand in municipal elections. [page 97]

16. All Classes of Society in Church

That Meyer had to write such words reflects the rigid class distinctions within Victorian society. They rarely mixed in terms of friendship, Meyer considered this as unchristian and wanted a church, like that of the New Testament, where people of all ranks were in comfortable fellowship in Christ. [page 98]

17. All Classes Friendly with One Another in Church

Meyer's aim "to break down the class barrier and he brought numbers of the poor of the neighborhood to the church. A third of the congregation, Mr. Turner thinks, would be working class." Turner added that not only did working class people attend but they were on friendly terms with those from the middle classes. [page 99]

18. Working While Traveling

He travelled all over the country, usually by train and often overnight. According to H. G. Saunders, who took over the editorship of *The Free Churchman* and often accompanied Meyer, the train became his office. He explained that once settled in a carriage, Meyer would "open his dispatch case which was fitted up as a sort of stationery cabinet, and set to work in supreme contentment on some abstruse article quite oblivious of his surroundings." He might then have a short sleep and be refreshed on arrival for the next meeting. [page 111]

19. Live Christianity

In 1908 he proclaimed, "Do not argue about the great principles of Christianity, but live them." This meant applying them to individual life styles and collective action. [page 111]

20. When Government Is Unchristian

In his later book, *The Dedicated Life*, he argued that disobedience is justified when the government's demands are clearly unchristian. He wrote, "When Caesar ... demands things which are not his, but God's than another principle steps in, and we are bound to refuse to give to the earthly ruler that to which he has no right." [pages 113-114]

21. Women Ministers

He was moving towards the radical position of women becoming Baptist ministers. [page 119]

22. No Separation of Church and Government to Help the Needy

He was now firmly of the opinion that help to individuals and welfare by the churches, although welcome, was insufficient and that Christians should be calling on government to introduce legislation to tackle poverty and injustice. The involvement of Christians in the world did not make them less spiritual and he summed up, "We must specially discountenance any attempt to divorce spiritual religion and politics." [page 120]

23. A Good Chairman of Business Meetings

He also chaired business sessions and one report noted his good-humored skill in enabling some speakers to keep their tempers under control. [page 121]

24. Changes in Society God-given

Meyer stated his belief that the huge changes taking place in society were God-given and that Baptists had a responsibility to make sure the message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified was not left out. Nor should Baptists shun political involvement and he again attacked the House of Lords for undermining the government's educational proposals. [page 121]

25. Lecturing in India

In 1898 to 1899, he undertook a strenuous lecture tour in India organized by the Students' Volunteer Movement. Within India, he travelled 20,000 miles, lectured in twenty large cities and, in all, made 120 addresses. He spoke mainly to Indian Christians through an interpreter but also to missionaries and to Indians of other faiths. [page 125]

26. Appalled at Treatment of American Blacks

In 1901, he was back in the USA and this time made his first visit to the southern states where he was appalled by the treatment of black people years after the American civil war. [page 126]

27. Disapproval of Discrimination

In 1904, Meyer had criticized the British government for allowing South African mine owners to import Chinese people to work in conditions which he described as “slave labor”. Now he saw racism at first hand. He was angered at the treatment by those of Dutch and British ancestry of what he called the colored and native populations, the former being “the mixture of the white and black races, while the latter denotes the pure blooded descendants of the original inhabitants of this land.”

Meyer made no secret of his disapproval of discrimination which meant that black people could not ride on the same trams as whites, could not walk in the parks or on the main pavements while few were allowed to participate in political life. He was “indignant that any should speak of them as niggers, deserving only to be horsewhipped or killed.” [page 128]

28. One Needs to Know Intimately the Subjective and Inner Meaning of the Cross

From the letters he received and from coverage in the press, it is clear that Meyer was well received in South Africa, did strengthen many Christians and did lead others to put their trust in Jesus Christ. Yet he too was blessed and received what can be called his fourth turning point. One evening, he retired to his room with a sense of failure. As he searched for a cause, it was shown to him that “it is impossible for the soul to have an experience of the Resurrection, Ascension or Pentecost unless it has first realized the subjective and inner meaning of the CrossIt is not enough to say that Christ died for us; it is peremptory that each believer should take up his own cross; or rather, that each should see himself already, in the purpose of God, nailed to the cross of Christ. Thus a new element entered my preaching ...”. Subsequent meetings were full of power and blessing. [page 130]

29. Good at Spiritual Self-examination

Meyer was never content to stagnate in his Christian life and was often examining the state of his own spirituality. [page 130]

30. Patriotism Comes from Religion

A year before the outbreak of the First World War, he wrote glowingly about patriotism stating, “Patriotism is the legitimate child of Religion.” Was there ever a keener patriot than Isaiah or Jeremiah?” He continued, “On the whole, then, we are bound by the decisions of the Government under which we elect to live, subjecting our personal preferences and tastes to the general conclusion to which our Nation may be led.” [page 145]

31. Encouraging Christians through Lives of Biblical People

The Keswick style was not to question the historical accuracy of Biblical people but rather to draw lessons from them in order to encourage Christians in their daily round. [page 154]

32. Meyer as a Missionary

As a boy, Meyer frequently heard about missionaries and says he was stirred by heroes such as David Livingstone and Robert Moffatt. He commented, “So profound was my veneration for them that it never entered my head that *I* should be a missionary. That I might become a Christian minister was within the limits of possibility, but to be a missionary - *never*.” [page 159]

33. Member of Several Missionary Societies

As well as delivering the call to missionaries, Meyer also identified with a number of missionary societies. Fullerton stated that the Baptist Missionary Society “was his first love” but he gave more time to non-denominational ones like the China Inland Mission, the London Missionary Society and, in particular, to the Regions Beyond Missionary Union (R.B.M.U.). His concern for missions abroad was recognized and intensified when, in 1895, he became associate editor of *The Missionary Review*, which was edited by his friend, the American the Revd A. T. Pierson. As mentioned, while at Christ Church, Meyer also founded a small missionary training college which later merged with one run by the R.B.M.U. [page 161]

34. Later in Life Longed to be a Missionary

During his tours, Meyer realized that he longed to be a missionary himself. During his Far East trip of 1909, he wrote, “As I look into the faces of these Chinese my heart loves them. ... I long to get to them with the message of Christ. Too late in life I learn what I have missed in not being a missionary. It is a great and profound *miss*, that in my case can not be undone.” [page 162]

35. Missionary Zeal Increasing with Age

It came to a head when Meyer, in 1920, was staying with friends at Skelmorlie on the Clyde coast in Scotland. Two of Livingstone’s African followers, who had accompanied his body home, had built a wooden hut of the kind in which Livingstone died. Kneeling alone in the hut, Meyer rededicated his remaining years to the Lord for the furtherance of the gospel abroad. He must be one of the few people whose missionary zeal increased with age. [page 162]

36. The Importance of Evangelism

Meyer regarded the second coming not just as something to be waited for but also as an evangelistic spur to the unconverted to turn to Christ before it was too late. Not least, in terms of work and effort, Meyer gave much of his time to missionary societies which, if nothing else, were vehicles for evangelism. His faith in evangelism remained unabated. [page 167]

37. Meyer Had Many Life Tasks

His friend William Fullerton wrote movingly, “Other men have lived as long; other men have travelled as far: other men have preached as often: other men have been loved as much; but none have combined all of these as fully as he.” In a sense, Meyer lived many lives but, as he put it a few months before his death, “If I had a hundred lives, they would be a Christ’s disposal.” [page 172]

38. Sermons Making a Spiritual Impact on Lives

Meyer was quick to point out that beautiful sermons were useless unless they made a spiritual impact on men and women. And that frequently happened. At Keswick one year, he spoke on the need to put things right in our lives before approaching God. The next day the post office ran out of money orders as people repaid others they had swindled, deceived or failed to repay. Later at Keswick, his missionary address led to many coming forward to commit themselves to service. [page 174]

39. A Christ-centered Preacher

Meyer was a Christ-centered preacher and his words about His Lord would touch deep emotions. [page 176]

40. Meyer Had Power in His Preaching

Successful preaching is not just about good techniques and well-written talks. Meyer had something extra. Power. An article in a New York paper in 1899 commented on one of his sermons, “There was no attempt at oratory, no effort to produce great thoughts ... yet one felt that there was a power in the message.” Other observers also contrasted the quietness of his approach with the strength of its effect. Meyer often preached about the power of the Holy Spirit and his speaking was an example of it in action. [page 177]

41. The Need of Practical Living

There is too much of mere sentiment and emotion in what goes by the name of religion and too little practical living. [page 178]

42. The Dangers of Hoarding Money

He gave particular attention to the Christian's attitude to money. While earning money is a legitimate even essential activity, he warns believers about the dangers of hoarding it. His advice to business people was to retain enough for the maintenance of their families, to put aside some for the development of the business, to keep some for old age "but when all this is done, look upon the remainder as God's to be used for Him." He gave examples about people he knew. One had the very large income of £8,000 a year but lived on £250 and gave away the remainder. Another, a governess, earned £100 a year and gave away £50. He wrote, "Let us not hoard what we have got. ...Let us be prodigal and spendthrift of our wealth." [page 179]

43. A Campaigner for Civic Righteousness

A campaigner for civic righteousness. A president of a number of national Christian societies, he was sometimes called President Meyer. At various times he was president of the National Union of Christian Endeavor, the National Sunday School Association (or Union), the young Christians' Missionary Union, as well as the Baptist union and the Free Church Council and others. He took his duties seriously, chairing meetings, planning strategies, speaking at rallies and sometimes travelling abroad on their behalf. Not least, he was zealous for missionary work in which he recruited volunteers, taught them at colleges, visited them in their outposts and, in his eighties, took over the administration of a missionary society which lacked leadership and money. And much more. [page 181]

44. Personal Supervision of a Flock

He once wrote, "It is not enough to preach to the flock once or twice each week. There must be personal supervision; watching for souls as by those who must give account; seeking them if they go astray, tracking them to the precipice down which they have fallen; and never resting until the straying sheep is brought again to the fold." He would go to enormous lengths to help individuals. In His Leicester days, he preached one evening in Northampton and declined the offer of overnight hospitality. He insisted on hurrying back to Leicester to be with a man who had backslidden into heavy drinking. In another case, he gave hours to a regular at Christ Church who confessed that he had committed a serious crime in New York. Meyer counselled him to go to the police and eventually he was jailed in New York. Later Meyer visited him there and found him in good spirits. [pages 182-183]

45. A Great Organizer

Meyer was a superb organizer. He insisted on being the head of the multitude of agencies within his churches. This did not mean he ran them on a day-to-day basis but rather that each had a committee which kept him informed. The committees also

appointed representatives which came to the council chaired by Meyer and which considered the directions and the programmes of each body. He advised that the minister be personally acquainted with the minutest details, including “the boiler used at the great tea meetings” and that he be prepared to “shift the forms for a meeting, dust seats, light a fire and see to the boiling water.” He was very much the leader of his churches but a leader who was not distant from the workers. His rare mixture of skills contributed to their large growth. [page 183]

46. Social Welfare and Class Integration

Likewise at Christ Church, some clubs had to be located outside, although always in the immediate neighborhood. But Meyer’s priority was the church as the hub of social action. He disliked missions because they separated social action from the church and did not break down the barriers between rich and poor. Locating it within the church not only promoted social integration, it also drew working class people nearer to the sound of the gospel. This successful bringing together of social welfare, class integration and evangelism was an outstanding feature of Meyer’s work. [page 185]

47. The Social and Spiritual Gospels Are One

A common criticism of ministers who become involved in welfare and politics is that their social gospel displaces their spiritual gospel. That accusation could not be levelled at Meyer who simultaneously proclaimed the atoning death of Christ, whose talks and books were all about holiness and who increasingly foresaw the imminent return of Jesus Christ. Further, he refused to accept the division between social and spiritual gospels. When he encouraged Christians “to endeavor to transfer as much as possible of our Lord’s teaching to the Statute Book of the Nation”, he did so not in a political speech but in the midst of his book about Christian living called *The Dedicated Life*. [page 187]

48. Meyer’s Sisters

Meyer also kept in touch with his three sisters. The Christ Church magazine of 1907 noted that one of them had become the honorary superintendent of the YWCA Servants’ Home in Brighton. After he fainted in the pulpit in 1913, he convalesced with his sisters. One of them was with him during his last days and Meyer, though so ill, was anxious that she be given a cup of tea. [page 188]

49. A Cross to Bear

Meyer suddenly said with fervor, “I have had a cross to bear in my life, and it has made me the man I am. [page 189]

50. Good Friends with Hudson Taylor and D.L. Moody

Meyer enjoyed a wide circle of friends. Most of them seemed to be active Christians, including families who gave him hospitality and ministerial colleagues. Enid Measures from Derbyshire told me that her grandfather, a Baptist minister, and his wife were friends of Meyer's and that they had a photo of him in the family photo album and had retained a Christmas card from him. He did not appear to engage in leisure activities with his friends, apart from long walks and conversations. Indeed, his only relaxation was reading, apart from sightseeing and hill climbing when on holidays and tours. In his unpublished *Memories of a Long Life*, Meyer lists a number of people of whom he spoke warmly as friends. Amongst the most treasured were Hudson Taylor and Dwight Moody. [page 191]

51. Careful with Other's Money

As a former employee of a city firm, it is not surprising that Meyer was careful about money – other people's money. Charities and societies valued him as a committee member because he understood accounts and was adept at raising funds. Yet he never worried about his own finances. Some Victorian ministers in fashionable churches enjoyed large salaries and lived in some style. Street states that Meyer did receive financially tempting offers which he always declined. [page 191]

52. Supported His Work from His Publications

Frequently, Meyer had to support his expanding work out of his own pocket. Certainly he did in Leicester and Christ Church. The local campaigns against brothels were financed almost entirely by him. He did all this from the proceeds of his publications. Meyer did not talk about the extent of his generosity and it was Jennie Street who revealed that he kept a separate account for these earnings and that he devoted "every penny earned by his pen to the work he has felt called to carry on without appealing to his fellow men for financial aid." [page 192]

53. God Would Meet His Needs

He also gave to individuals. In his writings, Meyer counselled Christians not to waste their money on so-called loafers. His own practice could be different and one close friend pointed out that he could not resist the appeal of anyone who was down and out. If there was doubt about the case, Meyer's response was "better to be let own occasionally than never to have the satisfaction of lending a helping hand."

He was always confident that God would meet his needs. One day he lent a man £5 to buy a share in a fish and chip shop and then realized he had no more money left and was shortly to start a train journey costing £3 for the fare. He was not worried and opened the day's mail. The first letter contained five one pound notes from somebody

to whom he had previously made a loan. He wrote, “In my life I have found repeatedly that in proportion as I have given I have gotten, and that men have given into my bosom, according to heaven’s own measure, pressed down, heaped up, and running over.” [page 192]

54. God Is Down Here Among Common Folk

Meyer was not a man to push himself to the front. He shared platforms with prime ministers and archbishops but he never sought their company, never tried to worm his way into the establishment, never hankered after honours. He certainly did not cultivate the friendship of the titled members of Regent’s Park. If anything the opposite was true. He stated that “God is down here among common folk” and that is where Christians should be. He often repeated that God’s glorious deeds were done not by the wealthy but by people like John Carey, a cobbler, and John Bunyan, a tinker. [page 193]

55. An Ordinary Man Becoming an Extra-ordinary Christian

He did not shine at school or college in studies or sport. In appearance and dress, he did not stand out in a crowd. Yet he sought to be close to God. He always started the day with prayers but not long ones, for he used to say that he had eternity in which to adore God. Yet he frequently prayed as he went about his daily round. Due to preach at Hitchin, he once jumped on a train only to find that the first stop was Peterborough. He went down on his knees and told God. The train slowed down at Hitchin and Meyer jumped out. His prayer time was followed by Bible study for at least a half hour. Meyer always sought to learn from other Christians and to deepen his own spirituality. He was prepared to follow Moody’s emphasis on evangelism, to consecrate his life under C.T. Studd, to receive the filling of the Holy Spirit by faith at Keswick, to identify himself with Christ’s death when in South Africa, and to commit himself to missionary expansion late in life. He rarely stood still physically or spiritually and so this ordinary man became an extra-ordinary Christian. [page 194]

56. An Extra-ordinary Servant of God

If he could become an extra-ordinary servant of God so may many other ordinary folk. [page 194]

57. The Gift of Gentleness

As a Keswick speaker, Meyer often spoke on the gifts of the Spirit – and one of these is gentleness.

He practiced what he preached and there are many mentions of his attentiveness, thoughtfulness, tenderness, and sympathy. One of his oldest members was suffering a deep depression when he saw her at church. Returning to his vestry, he immediately

wrote her a letter of comfort which strengthened her. Speaking at a large meeting with General William Booth, Meyer noticed there was just one boy present and he was pumping the organ ... Afterwards, Meyer sought him out to bless him – which the boy remembered all his life. [pages 195-196]

58. A Gentle and Quiet Spirit

These qualities did not mean that Meyer was a softie. He faced threats of violence, opposition from publicans and brothel owners, and criticisms in the press. He did not neglect the pursuit of justice. He expressed the whole Biblical concept of gentleness. The Christian scholar, Alec Motyer, concluded that, even in Christian circles, we tend to admire the more extrovert and pushy leaders. He continues that, if offered a gift, few would choose “a gentle and quiet spirit”. Yet gentleness is an attractive quality and one that Christians need to display in an increasingly aggressive, noisy and selfish culture. [page 197]