



IN MEMORIAM

Bernard Johnson Meyer

Bern Meyer was born in the Mossel Bay district on 6 March 1919 and died peacefully, after a short illness, in Pretoria on 30 March 2008.

He obtained a BSc degree in chemistry and physiology at the University of Stellenbosch in 1937. This was followed by a Doctorate in physiology in 1946, an MB ChB degree in 1951, and an MD in pathology in 1963, all at the University of Pretoria where he became Professor and Head of the Department of Physiology until his retirement in 1984. He then joined me at the Department of Nuclear Medicine as Associate Professor and Acting Head for several periods until just a week before his death.

Not only was Bern a dedicated professor of generations of medical students but also an accomplished researcher as Director of the Medical Research Council Units of Electrophysiology and Cellular Physiology. However, his greatest interest and achievement was writing the many books on human physiology, in English and Afrikaans, which became the prescribed textbooks of many medical faculties in South Africa. During his academic life he was honoured with distinctions by many national and international institutions for his exemplary sense of duty and dedication to medical education. He received the *dux docens laureatus* and MD (*honoris causa*) from the Universities of Pretoria and the Free State, Pretorian of the Year from the City of Pretoria, and Special Distinction by the Medical Research Council. He was a member of SAMA for 54 years.

Reciting facts such as these is like reading the dust cover of a great book. You get a brief summary of the content, but you don't learn anything of what is inside. Let us peer further into the nature of Bern Meyer.

Professor Meyer was soft spoken, but determined in will; he was gentle in demeanour, but firm in resolve; he was modest and unassuming, but strongly principled; he was small in physical stature, but lofty in ideals. Bern was honest and loyal. He was committed to what he felt was right and worthy. He was brave and courageous, traits that were tested by the chronic deteriorating health of his wife, Aletta. Where others might have given up in despair or complained resentfully, Bern faced this reality with optimism and faithfulness to his ideals and religious principles until the very end.

Bern had a unique sense of humour, which in keeping with his personality was subtle and gentle. He was always available to give what would invariably turn out to be sensible and sage advice. But above all his great lesson was humility by showing his friends and students that only through humility can you achieve great understanding.

In the Bible it is written: '... what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, and to love kindness and mercy, and to humble yourself and walk humbly with your God?' (*Micah* 6: 8). If we accept that charge as the ultimate yardstick against which we measure the accomplishments of our life on this earth, then we must conclude that Bern Meyer fulfilled his mission in life with nothing short of complete perfection.

Bern exuded endless love, genuine affection and kindness for and toward his wife Aletta, his son Jacques, grandchildren, friends, and colleagues, and they returned the same without hesitation or restriction. His passing leaves a permanent void in their hearts, ameliorated only partially by the joy and privilege of having known him.

Mario P Iturralde

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