



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

An appreciation of Rev Cecil Menary, 1922-1999, by Dr. Alan Cairns.

Rev. Cecil Menary September 9, 1922—October 15, 1999.

An Appreciation by Dr. Alan Cairns (Greenville, SC)



Rev. Cecil Menary and his wife Elizabeth and the gifts presented at a meeting in our Ballymoney Church in thanksgiving for his ministry, on 12th December 1997. Also in the picture are Rev. David Park and his wife and Dr. Ian Paisley.

The first memory I have of Cecil Menary goes back to my teenage years when I was a member of our Mount Merrion church. We were having special Harvest Thanksgiving services and Cecil was the guest preacher for the Monday evening service. As soon as he read the Scriptures we knew what his text was going to be. And we knew something he didn't know--the preacher for the Sunday evening service had preached from the same text. The Sunday evening service had been a good meeting with good preaching but Cecil's treatment of the text was very different and riveted the attention of the entire congregation. I well remember the very real sense of the Lord's presence, the sense of deep

conviction of sin, and the sense of the urgent reality of eternity. As I recall, five precious souls came to Christ that Monday night-and, in a church that was used to the powerful evangelistic preaching of Rev. Bert Cooke, I was deeply impressed with Cecil Menary's gift as a preacher of the gospel.

Cecil was the first candidate for the Free Presbyterian ministry to be received by our Presbytery after the founding of the church in 1951. An only child, he was born in Lisburn and later lived in the Ormeau Road area of Belfast. For a while as a young man he sought his pleasures in sport and music. He started his own amateur boxing club--a fact that many who only knew him as a very cultured man of the cloth find difficult to credit! He became an accomplished jazz pianist and was often in demand to perform for dances, sometimes solo and sometimes with a dance band. He also developed something of a passion for ball-room dancing and appeared to be taking the way of worldly amusement without too much concern for spiritual things.

Then in 1947 a neighbour, Mr. Albert Robinson, of the New Testament Missionary Union, invited Cecil to a gospel mission. After the mission service Mr. Robinson gave him the tract Safety, Certainty, and Enjoyment. Cecil read it with deep interest about half a dozen times. The Lord used that tract to draw him to Himself and Cecil Menary fell to his knees to call upon the name of the Lord.

He rose a new man, with new interests. Soon he felt the call of God to full time service and entered Belfast Bible College. He completed the College's two year course and did extra study by correspondence with the London Bible College. He became active in mission outreach work both in Ulster and in the Irish Republic. Visiting door to door and engaging in



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

tent preaching were two of the ways in which Cecil sought to serve the Lord and reach souls for Christ. Free Presbyterian Church At that time he was a member of Berry Street Presbyterian Church, whose minister was the nationally known evangelical leader, Rev. Ivor Lewis. Ivor Lewis was a good friend of the young Ian Paisley and so when Mr. Paisley needed a young man to help in the newly formed and fast developing witness of the Free Presbyterian Church Mr. Lewis recommended Cecil Menary to him. They met and Cecil decided that this was the Lord's leading for him and so became the first student accepted to train as a minister in the Free Church.

Initially he was supposed to go to Mount Merrion, a Belfast suburb, to pioneer a new congregation. However, when the scheduled preacher for Cabra (now Ballymoney) suffered an accident Cecil had to stand in for him. As soon as the Cabra people heard him preach they asked the Presbytery to place him as their student minister. The Presbytery agreed-indeed they placed him in charge of the congregation in Rasharkin as well. He continued this dual pastorship from August 1951 until November 1952 when he chose to be pastor of Rasharkin, leaving the newest recruit, John Wylie, to become student minister in Cabra.

Cecil remained in Rasharkin for over eleven years and then moved on to pastor the church in Crossgar. In 1964 he married Elizabeth McAuley, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Sandy McAuley whose vision and stand were largely instrumental in the establishment of the Cabra church. Throughout the following 35 years of married life Cecil enjoyed the unfailing support of a wife who gave unselfishly of herself in every aspect of the work in which her husband was involved. Cecil's ministry in Crossgar lasted over 25 years, until his retirement in 1987. Though primarily a pastor, he was involved in many other aspects of the work. For more than 15 years he served as Clerk of Presbytery and later as a member of the Mission Board. He also became a member of the teaching staff of the Whitefield College of the Bible, where he taught Bible Survey. As the editor of our young people's magazine Truth for Youth I invited Cecil to become a regular columnist. His Between You and Me column was usually the first thing most readers turned to. He had a keen wit, a dry sense of humour, and a very winning way of writing his homespun philosophy of Christian life and godliness. Older Ulster readers may remember the name of Matt Mulcaghey the famed columnist for the Tyrone Constitution. Cecil knew Matt, and I believe was distantly related to him. Certainly he wrote in the same easy, down to earth way that attracted young people to his message. He also displayed his interest in young people by his involvement in a summer youth camp. For a number of years he went with a large group of young people from many Free Churches to the Isle of Man. For some years he led the Bible studies and later served as organizer and director of the camp.

In the mid-1970s I asked Cecil to try a radio version of his popular magazine column in our international radio ministry, Let the Bible Speak . He did so with great effectiveness and his weekly contributions were a source of encouragement to me in trying to keep that ministry fresh and interesting.

Through all those years Cecil's preaching ministry was confined to the British Isles. He loved to travel, and was a keen outdoors man--he liked to golf, to walk, and especially to camp. He made only one stipulation about where he travelled: he had to go by road or by sea. He refused to travel by air. However, that all changed in 1979 when the Presbytery asked him to go to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to minister in the infant church there. He



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

agreed and, swallowing his fear, took to the air. Would you believe it, on the very first leg of his flight a woman had to be led off the plane in terror--she too was afraid of flying! Cecil was shaken and wondered if he should follow her off but he valiantly overcame his horror of flying and reached Philadelphia without mishap. Further foreign trips followed. Three times he and Elizabeth went to Australia to minister to the church in Port Lincoln. Three times they went to Canada to minister in the church in Calgary.

It was while he was in Australia in 1990 that Cecil suffered the heart attack that put an end to his preaching ministry. His health never really recovered after that attack and in recent years it declined very noticeably. Over the last four or five years he suffered a series of strokes, each one leaving him a little weaker than before. He bore his illness with typically quiet courage. At times his weakness discouraged him and he felt somewhat cut off from his brethren but the Lord gave him the grace to go on and bear a good testimony. He always loved to sing. He was one of the few Free Presbyterian ministers who could sing really well. In his earlier days he would bring blessing to many a congregation as he sang his testimony in the old hymn Ship Ahoy! In his dying days he still loved to sing. Remarkably, not long before he died, when his memory was failing and confusion was overtaking him, he could still pray and sing with clarity. Apologising to his wife and sister-in-law Sadie Mc Auley that his voice was getting weak with age, he sang a verse and chorus of The Way of the Cross Leads Home and then Anywhere with Jesus I Can Safely Go. What a testimony in the valley of the shadow!

Cecil Menary passed away peacefully at his Ballymoney home late on Friday, October 15, 1999. He was a gentleman, an engaging conversationalist with a sense of humour that was sharp but never hurtful. Better than that, he was a faithful husband and pastor, a godly man and a gifted preacher of the gospel of free grace. He laboured well, he ran the race, he finished the course, and now he has gone to be with Christ. The large number of ministers at his funeral services in Ballymoney testified to the high esteem in which his brethren held him. No more fitting testimony could have been raised than that of the hymns chosen for his funeral service, Sweeping Through the Gates of the New Jerusalem, Washed in the Blood of the Lamb, and It Is Well with My Soul. He has gone but do not call his passing death for, as D. L. Moody said long ago, when the world says a Christian is dead he is more alive than ever before. To Cecil's widow Elizabeth we offer our sincere sympathy. As his wife, she was always his devoted companion, co-labourer, counsellor, and friend. During these last years of his increasing weakness she added the services of a tireless nurse. For those so close parting is never easy. We commend Elizabeth to God and to the word of His grace in the assurance that Cecil's last testimony in song as he sang to her and her sister a week or so before he died will be just as true for her as it was for him.

— Alan Cairns.