

WILLIAM W. MENZIES' LIFE SUMMARY

By his sons Glen W. Menzies and Robert P. Menzies

William W. Menzies (July 1, 1931–August 15, 2011) was well known in Pentecostal circles as an educator, historian and theologian. He was also a missionary who spent the latter decades of his life between two poles: Springfield, Missouri, where he lived on-and-off for fifty years, and Baguio City, Philippines, where he served as President and Chancellor of Asia Pacific Theological Seminary (APTS). Over the course of his career he taught full-time or served as an administrator at five institutions of higher learning: Central Bible College (1958-1970), Evangel University (1970-1980), the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary (1974-1984), California Theological Seminary (1985-1987), and APTS (President 1989-1996; Chancellor 1996-2011). The author of nine books and numerous articles, he also founded, along with Vinson Synan and Horace Ward, the Society for Pentecostal Studies (SPS), which was among his most important accomplishments. He also served as the first President of the SPS and the first editor of its journal, *Pneuma*. To us, however, he was simply "Dad."

"Bill," as his friends called him, was born in New Kensington, PA. He was the son of William E. and Sophie B. Menzies. Named after his father, his parents always called him "Junior."

William Sr., our grandpa, had earned a degree in electrical engineering from Penn State and spent much of his life engaged in both engineering and church planting. He would work for a while in engineering to save money. Then he would quit his job and build a church building. Grandma would play her trombone, both would

preach, and when they got enough people coming to support a regular pastor, they would turn the church over to the new pastor and Grandpa would go back to engineering and saving more money. Eventually, the family moved to Dayton, Ohio, which is really where dad grew up.

One of Dad's teen-age passions was ham radio, and he held a ham radio operator's license until the day he died. He fiddled with receivers, transmitters, matchboxes and antennas. Glen remembers him telling a story about a neighborhood friend who also loved to work on things, including ham gear. Unfortunately, this friend's parents would not let him own a screwdriver. They wanted him to grow up to earn a living with his head, not his hands. So this friend would sneak over to Dad's place whenever he needed to use a screwdriver.

His first ham radio transmitter was a used model he found at the attractive price of \$20.00. Apparently he did not have the money, so he convinced his mother to let him get the transmitter and help him finance the purchase. She was impressed with all of his research on the cost and became convinced he had located a good deal. What he did not tell his mom was why the transmitter was available. Apparently the previous owner had been electrocuted by it. If his mom had known, she never would have let him buy such a deadly machine. However, Dad put a "bleeder resistor" across the big can condenser that had killed its owner, making it much less of a hazard.

These stories explain something important about Dad. His attitude was: Why not be good with both your head and with your hands? Dad was not interested in either mindless labor or in abstract theory that never connected with real life. He appreciated good theology, but good theology for him also meant that it impacted the life of the church.

When Dad graduated from high school he planned to become an engineer like his father. He enrolled at Ohio State. Somehow, he quickly sensed that this was not what God wanted for him, and he soon transferred to Central Bible Institute (CBI) in Springfield, Missouri, feeling that God had placed a call to ministry on his life.

Dad distinguished himself in school, earning good grades. Elmer Kirsch, a friend and classmate, remembers him as a "brilliant" student. Another schoolmate from those years once complained to Glen

that Dad had often set the curve, making the classes rougher on him than they would have been otherwise. During Dad's last year at CBI he was layout editor of the yearbook and was chosen as class speaker.

At Dad's funeral we were both surprised to learn that Dad had sung in the male chorus at CBI, since we never thought of him as being musical. We also learned that one of his roles was class "publican," a junior class official who was charged with collecting dues. We wish we had known about this earlier. As we were growing up we could have made good use of this, teasing Dad about being a "publican and sinner."

One of the more colorful activities Dad got involved in during his CBI days was the outstation ministry at Bald Knob in Taney County, in the center of Ozark "hillbilly" country. The plan was to plant a church in a one-room schoolhouse. The school had no electricity, but there was a gas lamp hanging from the ceiling.

At that time there was an active feud between two of the families in the area, so some carried guns to the schoolhouse. Also, one gentleman wanted to attend services, but he was afraid to come on his own. He would attend if one of the CBI students would pick him up, because he was quite sure no one would shoot him while he was with a "reverend."

Someone cut the brake lines on Elmer Kirsch's car, and it was only divine providence that kept several of the CBI students from dying in a car plunge from one of those old Ozark switch-back roads that were so common in the early fifties. Kirsch used the emergency brake to get back to CBI.

Despite the opposition, the work prospered and a church of about 60 people was established. Then came the event that ended it all. The wife of the Sunday School Superintendent plotted with a neighbor, who also attended the church, to kill her husband. The bloody deed was done with a pitchfork in the Sunday School Superintendent's barn. There was little law at that time in Taney County, since the sheriff had been run out of town and the deputy had quit lest a similar fate befall him. They finally were able to get a sheriff from Greene County to come down and arrest the murderer. The moral stain from these events killed the CBI out-station efforts at Bald Knob.

Following Dad's graduation from CBI, he decided to attend Wheaton College, near Chicago, in order to obtain a bachelor's and then a master's degree. There he met Doris Dresselhaus, a farm-girl from northern Iowa.

Their first date took place in the basement apartment of Bob and Eilene Cooley. Eilene cooked a special spaghetti meal and no doubt the food was a hit. There is also no doubt that Mom was a bigger hit with Dad than the food. Soon they were married.

After three years of pastoring in Michigan, and the addition of two incredibly handsome young boys to their home, Dad was asked to return to CBI as a teacher in 1958. Although money was scarce and Dad worked hard, those were some of the happiest years of their lives. In 1962 Dad began a two-year leave-of-absence from CBI so he could take doctoral classes at the University of Iowa. His program was in American Church History, and eventually he began work on the history of the Assemblies of God.

When Dad was preparing for his oral exams at the University, little five-year-old "Bobby," as he was called in those days, was impressed by a story Dad told of a man who had fainted during his doctoral examinations. So late in the afternoon on the day of Dad's oral exams, as he returned home from this grueling ordeal, Bobby rushed to the door to meet him, crying out, "Did you faint, Daddy?" Bobby was relieved to learn that things had gone well, and his dad had not fainted.

After returning to Springfield and to CBI in 1964, Dad began serious work on his dissertation. Summers were devoted to travelling the country to interview important figures in Pentecostal history. Since the cost of staying at hotels was prohibitive for our family, Dad purchased a small camper that he hauled all over the United States. Those summers were incredibly interesting. When Dad was off interviewing, Mom and her boys would play in some scenic campsite. On the days Dad was free, we would tour battlefields or historic buildings or national parks.

We were always proud of our dad, a fact that is illustrated by an event that happened in the mid-1960s as our family was driving through the Western part of the United States. We came to a narrow bridge just as a large earth-moving machine was slowly plodding

across. Dad attempted to pass the machine and miscalculated, sideswiping one side of the bridge. It was a scary moment, with the car sliding and tires screeching. When the dust settled, Bobby's small voice broke through the silence, "Dad, I wasn't proud of you back there." Mom and Dad broke into laughter, which did a lot to reassure us that everything was all right. That was perhaps the only moment in his 80 years that either of us was not proud of Dad.

When Dad's dissertation had been completed and his degree conferred, we might have expected Dad's scholarly activity to slow down a bit. Instead, it started all over again. The General Council leadership asked Dad to expand his dissertation into a more comprehensive history of the Assemblies of God. This required more interviewing and more traveling, but we did not mind a bit. More research meant more camping. Finally, in 1971, *Anointed to Serve* was published.

In 1970 Dad announced his decision to move across town to teach at Evangel College. One would think this would not have been a big deal, but this simple decision by a lowly professor produced a huge amount of controversy. When he was about 14, Glen remembers being confronted near the entrance to Central Bible College by someone who felt the need to explain, "You know, your father is a traitor!" Glen responded, "Then maybe you ought to talk to him about that instead of me."

Dad spent a decade teaching at Evangel, during most of which he also served as the Chairman of the Department of Biblical Studies and Philosophy. During that time two of his students were his sons. These too were happy years.

As teenagers we boys always felt we had a sacred responsibility to keep Dad humble. He was not a social or professional climber. Although he always dressed nicely—Mom saw to that!—he was never overly concerned about his clothes. In this sense he was a child of Azusa Street; he lived simply and did not attempt to stand out. He was not a self-promoter. Generally, his clothes were neat, conservative and simple. So whenever Mom did attempt to buy something new or in the slightest bit trendy, we took notice. When Dad

came to the breakfast table wearing his “fancy new clothes,” we would cheer, “Bill Menzies goes modern!”

It was during this time that Dad, along with Vincent Synan and Horace Ward, established an academic society designed to promote research among Pentecostals. Many will regard the founding of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, which today draws hundreds of scholars from around the world to its annual meetings, as one of Dad’s signal achievements. Dad served as the first President of the society and as the first editor of *Pneuma*, the society’s scholarly journal.

At this time, when many Assemblies of God people distrusted scholarship and academic pursuits, Dad, largely because of his godly character, humble spirit and encouraging manner was somehow able to disarm their suspicions. After meeting Dad, people would often think, “Well, I guess these scholars aren’t all bad.” Dad won people over and, in this way, he helped change attitudes within the Pentecostal movement towards higher education and scholarship. In short, he paved the way so that others could follow.

Following his time at Evangel, Dad taught for three years at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, spent a year as Interim President at FEAST (the Far East Advanced School of Theology) and then two years as the Vice-President for Academic Affairs at California Theological Seminary.

Dad was famous for the triangles he often drew on chalkboards or whiteboards. The many ideas and relationships these triangles illustrated are beyond counting. But there was a great deal more to Dad’s teaching than the way he packaged things. He was a firmly convinced Pentecostal, and he believed that Pentecostal identity must be grounded in theology, not sociology. Pentecostals had an important insight into the nature of apostolic Christianity; it was not simply the disgruntled response of people living on the margins of society to their economic plight.

Dad was also a stickler for academic honesty. He did not like it when scholars or organizations intentionally did not tell the truth. For instance, when Dad was preparing *Anointed to Serve*, his history of the Assemblies of God, he accurately pointed out that the AG was strongly committed to pacifism—the refusal to participate in war—prior to

World War II. He was asked to remove this from his book because this was viewed as “inconvenient” in the early 70’s, the Vietnam War era when the book was being prepared. Dad refused to shade the truth in this way, although he tried to find a more diplomatic way to get the basic message across. Dad himself was not a pacifist, but he thought it was important to tell the story accurately.

Dad believed the greatest blunder that the American Assemblies of God (AG) made during his lifetime was the way it ignored the Charismatic Movement, acting as if it wished the Charismatics would simply go away. Not only was this a failure to recognize the hand of God at work, the AG forfeited the opportunity to provide leadership to a movement that needed leadership and stability. In the end, the Charismatic Movement had considerably greater impact on Classical Pentecostalism than Classical Pentecostalism had on the Charismatic Movement. It did not need to be this way.

While Dad was certainly a passionately committed Pentecostal, he rejected any sort of Pentecostalism that minimized the importance of either Scripture or Christ. Another way to say this is that his Pentecostalism was both bibliocentric and Christocentric. While Pentecostals think spiritual experience is important, Dad insisted that all spiritual experience must be judged by the standards of Scripture. He was also skeptical of any emphasis on the Spirit that minimized the importance of Christ. Dad was not the sort of guy to look for parallels between Buddhist mysticism and Christian experiences of the Spirit. He believed the Holy Spirit was “the Spirit of Christ” and would always point to him. Christ is the anchor that grounds any attempt to discern which spirits are of God and which are not.

Prayer was a key to Dad’s ministry. As young boys we remember often seeing Dad pace back and forth in our basement, calling out to God in prayer. Bob recalls borrowing Dad’s Bible once and thumbing through the pages. As he did this, he came across a list of prayer requests. On a small piece of paper Dad had listed a number of items that formed the basis of his daily prayer. One item in particular stood out. He had written something like this: “Lord, help me care less about how other people view me and more about how you view me.” That prayer clearly shaped Dad’s life.

In 1989 Dad became President of Asia Pacific Theological Seminary. For the preceding twenty years Dad had made summer trips teaching in various missionary settings, often in Manila or Seoul. In some ways his appointment at APTS was a natural extension of this part-time missionary activity. Apparently he had proven he had a missionary's heart. Moving to the Philippines gave Dad a new jolt of enthusiasm and energy. He seemed to relish the challenges of cross-cultural ministry and leadership. Also, the fact that some of his students faced the real prospect of imprisonment or martyrdom was a constant reminder of how much was at stake.

In 1996 our mother had a serious heart attack while in the Philippines. Since this resulted in extensive damage to her heart, it effectively ended their ability to live overseas. Mom was put on a transplant list and, in 1998, received a new heart.

After Mom's transplant, Mom and Dad returned to Springfield and lived quiet but joyful lives in retirement until illness took them both. The last eight months of Dad's life were consumed by tending to Mom and spending time with her, a task he fulfilled joyfully. In many ways the care of old people for each other reveals a far deeper love than the passion of newlyweds. We will always remember the way our parents loved each other. And that, apart from their relationship with God, was their most important accomplishment of all.