

The Maryknoll Spirit

The personal influences of Maryknoll's first two superior generals, James A. Walsh and James E. Walsh, and Maryknoll's first mother general, Mother Mary Joseph, contributed to making Maryknoll a unique place, constantly "feeding [students] with a mission spirit and a mission zeal."⁶⁰ They were the ones who shaped that "something special and different" about Maryknoll which is known as the Maryknoll spirit.

Father James A. Walsh was undoubtedly the person who forged its mold. Until his death in April 1936, he closely supervised the formation of seminarians and Brothers and gave them weekly spiritual lectures. He also gave regular Sunday conferences and occasional addresses to the Sisters and the novices. He infused his listeners with his admiration and devotion for the French missionary martyr Théophile Vénard. It was not just by coincidence that the first Maryknoll Junior Seminary in Pennsylvania was called the Venard. Théophile Vénard was presented as the model of the Maryknoll missionary prepared to go "the whole way" for Christ. According to Father Robert Sheridan who entered Maryknoll in 1921, this martyrdom mystique was one of the most pervasive characteristics of the formation given by James A. Walsh: "We were filled with this . . . great spirit of self-sacrifice, and we were going to go to China and never come back. That was all in the air we breathed in the beginning of Maryknoll."⁶¹

But James A. Walsh was also a realist who wanted his missionaries to be prepared for the realities of the missions. He was quick to mention that as "picturesque and strikingly impressive . . . the thought of a man or a woman laying down his [or her] life for Christ" might be, the testimony that Maryknollers were asked to give was rarely "the actual shedding of [their] blood," but rather "an opportunity to stand and wear [themselves] out for Christ," even until the last breath, like four of their predecessors who died in China, Father Thomas Price in 1919, Father Anthony Hodgins in 1922, Sister Mary Gertrude Moore in 1923, and Father Daniel McShane in 1927.⁶²

In July 1928, Walsh presented his thoughts on the subject at a Sunday conference for the Sisters on the occasion of the Feast of the Precious Blood:

Very few of us will actually shed blood for Christ, but there is none of us who will not have the opportunity to thin out his blood for Christ. . . . The spiritual sufferings and moral trials we may have to endure are by far the most difficult. There is also the difficulty in physical discomforts. There is great trial to be endured through the first long years of heat which is very weakening. After that it becomes less burdensome because the blood thins

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company of heroic and saintly

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other societies to speak to the
Maryknollers themselves be-
temporary assignments in the
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mented by many informal talks
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Cotta was a veteran of mission
and his stand on the side of the
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the need for well-trained native
"forget their own country."

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Sister-novices, informally shar-
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es Anthony Walsh and of many
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Cotta's impact on the Maryknoll
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