

CHAPEL MESSAGE FOR DECEMBER 16, 1994 : David C. McClain

It isn't often that I have the opportunity to speak in one of our college chapels. It's always a challenge to decide how to use the half-hour to best advantage. I've sat through a lot of chapels here at Baptist Bible College during the past 27 years. I know that most listeners soon forget the average message, even if they have been paying careful attention to the speaker. I realize, too, that most of us can easily "turn off" a speaker if his theme is well known or if his presentation is boring. So, what can I say that will make you want to listen to me today, that will make this session a worthwhile investment of your valuable time?

Well, today I would like to talk to you about two schools. The one school is called Baptist Bible College and it is located in Clarks Summit, Pa. Before it moved to Northeastern Pa. in 1968, Baptist Bible College was located in Johnson City, N.Y. Up in New York State it called itself Baptist Bible Seminary, even though it was a Bible college without a theological seminary. That is the first school I'm going to talk about today.

Now, would you believe that I am also going to talk about a Catholic school which was once located in Clarks Summit, Pa., a school operated by the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America, a mission society usually called the Maryknoll Fathers. That school was also located on this same property. It was on this very property that Catholic students once prepared to become missionaries, or "missioners" as the Catholics call them. We Baptists are just now in our 27th year in Clarks Summit. But before we arrived, the former owners of this property and their students had lived, studied, worshipped, and played on this site for 50 years.

Now, before you decide to get up and leave in protest -- since this sounds like a rather questionable topic for a chapel message -- please bear with me. I want you to compare your dedication with theirs. You testified in your college application that you know the Savior. You say that you believe the Bible. You claim that you are interested in knowing the will of God for your life. And, by the grace of God, you have been permitted to live, study, worship, and play on this site. I ask you this simple question: How well does your dedication measure up against that of the Catholic students who once occupied this campus and who decided, in the best way they knew how, that their lives could make a difference in foreign lands?

I begin by directing your attention to the last words spoken by Christ before He returned to heaven. You can find them at the close of Matthew chapter 28 and, also, in the first chapter of the Book of Acts. To help you understand what a Catholic sees when he finds these passages, I will be reading from a Catholic version, the New Jerusalem Bible:

Matthew 28:16-20: Meanwhile the eleven disciples set out for Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had arranged to meet them. When they saw him they fell down before him, though some hesitated. Jesus came up and spoke to them. He said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time."

Acts 1:6-11: Now having met together, they asked him, "Lord, has the time come for you to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know times or dates that the Father has decided by his own authority, but you will receive the power of the Holy Spirit which will come on you, and then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judaea and Samaria, and indeed to earth's remotest end." As he said this he was lifted up while they looked on, and a cloud took him from their sight. They were still staring into the sky as he went when suddenly two men in white were standing beside them and they said, "Why are you Galileans standing here looking into the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will come back in the same way as you have seen him go to heaven."

Please notice that this was not a suggestion He gave His disciples. It was not His departing wish. It was His command. They were to evangelize and disciple others, beginning with their own city (Jerusalem), continuing throughout their region (Judaea), expanding into the hated territory to the north of them (Samaria), and spreading throughout the rest of the inhabited world.

The Book of Acts serves, among other things, as a written record of their missionary efforts. In chapters 1-7 they evangelized in Jerusalem. In chapters 8-11 they expanded throughout Judaea and into Samaria. In chapters 12-26 they moved outside the Holy Land to reach men and women for Christ. This they understood to be their reasonable service. Their Lord and God had commanded them. They obeyed His marching orders. They were taking Christ to the nations.

We are the spiritual successors of the Apostles. In John chapter 17 Jesus prayed for us when he prayed for those who would believe on Him through the testimony of his Apostles. They are gone but we are alive on earth at this time so that we may continue the work they began so long ago, the task of taking Christ to the nations of the world.

Our own school began with a missionary emphasis in 1932 in Johnson City, N.Y. By the world's standards we were small and insignificant. There were only 4 full-time faculty and just a handful of students. There was no campus -- just a borrowed church building. But there were dedicated students who believed that, with God's blessing, they could make a difference. And they did, for many of them from that unaccredited 3-year Bible institute took the gospel to foreign lands where, for a lifetime, they labored faithfully for our Lord. We call them "missionaries," for they were men and women with a mission -- Christ's ambassadors instructing the world to be reconciled to God.

The General Association of Regular Baptist Churches (we call it the GARBC), the fellowship of churches with which our college has closely aligned itself through the years, also began in 1932 with a missionary emphasis. At the 2nd annual meeting, in Buffalo, N.Y., in 1933, Harry Hamilton, in his presidential address, gave the five objectives of the Association. The fourth objective was related to missions:

"FOURTH--it is an organization designed to promote a missionary spirit amongst Baptist churches for the spread of the gospel in all the world, and to content earnestly

for the faith once for all delivered to the saints."

That year, 1933, Earl Griffith was chairman of the GARBC missionary committee. The next year he served as president of the GARBC. He was later to become president of our college. But it was while he was still serving the General Association that two of our premier mission boards were approved by the GARBC. One of the mission boards was the General Council of Cooperative Baptist Missions of North America; its name was later changed to Baptist Mid-Missions. The other board was the Association of Baptists for Evangelism in the Orient which changed its name in 1939 to the Association of Baptists for World Evangelism (today we refer to it as ABWE).

Dr. Earl Griffith was named the third president of our school in 1935 because our second president, Harold Commons, left to accept the presidency of ABWE. Dr. Commons served that mission board as its president until 1971 when Wendell Kempton left his administrative position here at our college to become the president of ABWE. As for the other mission board, Baptist Mid-Missions, its current president, Gary Anderson, was the Chairman of our college Board of Trustees when he assumed the mission board presidency in 1969. So you can see that our college administrators and the GARBC have been vitally involved in missions from their earliest days right up to the present.

From our first year in 1932 until 1966 we continued to grow and experience God's blessing upon our school at its location in Johnson City, N.Y., about an hour's drive north of Clarks Summit. By that time we were operating as an accredited, degree-granting Bible college. But there was simply no room to expand on that site, so an extensive search was made up and down the East coast to find another property where we could relocate. Finally, in 1967 this property in Clarks Summit was placed on the market, we found out about it, and the rest is history.

I first visited this site in the Fall of 1967, while still serving as a pastor in Ohio. Sensing that God was directing me to a vocational change, I became an employee of this college on April 1, 1968. Our family of four moved to Clarks Summit where we lived alone for several weeks in the building now known as Jackson Hall. Our college was finishing up its last semester in N.Y. State so I commuted daily to and from Johnson City until the school year ended in June. The last of the Catholics were preparing to move off the property when the McClain family moved on to campus.

Through the years since then it has been a continuing interest of mine to learn all I could about the former residents of this property. I have corresponded with the parent organization, the Maryknoll Fathers, located about 30 miles north of N.Y.C. in Maryknoll, N.Y. I have interviewed former students from the Catholic era. I have read the student-produced literature from the 1930s which was left behind for us. I have collected whatever I could find about the Maryknoll order. From my investigation I have gained an appreciation for the dedication of the Maryknoll Missioners. It is from this perspective that I challenge you to evaluate your dedication to your own spiritual calling and mission. We are the spiritual successors of the Apostles, the chronological successors of the Baptist Bible Seminary of Johnson City, N.Y., and the geographical successors of the Maryknoll Fathers.

The property we presently occupy was popularly known as the Venard [pronounced VAY-nard]. It was named in honor of Theophane Venard, a Catholic missionary who was beheaded in Vietnam in 1861 at age 32. In response to my request for information about the Venard property, in 1979 the Maryknoll Fathers sent me a letter and a book for our library. From that letter I quote the following paragraph:

"Since you showed such interest in the history of the Venard, I am sending you under separate cover a copy of the book which brought several thousand young men and boys to the Venard over the fifty years of its existence as the Maryknoll Apostolic College."

The book they sent is entitled *A Modern Martyr*. It's a biography of Theophane Venard, written by James A. Walsh. It was the same Father Walsh (later to become Bishop Walsh) who was cofounder and first director of the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America, usually known as the Maryknoll Fathers. James A. Walsh was consumed with the importance of foreign missions and totally dedicated to perpetuating Catholic missions as modeled by the martyred Frenchman, Theophane Venard. I quote to you now from a history of the Maryknoll order, *Maryknoll in China*, which tells of Father James A. Walsh who, until his death in 1936,

"infused his listeners with his admiration and devotion for the French missionary martyr Theophane Venard. It was not just by coincidence that the first Maryknoll Junior Seminary in Pennsylvania was called the Venard. Theophane Venard 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.'

"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 ..."

I now quote from the *Venarder*, the student publication of Maryknoll College, the Spring 1938 issue:

"Monuments have been built from time immemorial to the memories of great men. And thus in perpetuation of a noble character and more so to honor a heroic sacrifice our Venard College represents a huge and everlasting monument to the memory of Theophane Venard. This young missionary ... is without a doubt worthy of such a great monument; for he is great among those who have laid down their lives as witnesses to the faith of Christ.

"Therefore the men who erected this edifice and called it the Venard did so with a set purpose, for they knew that the life of Theophane would present a concrete appeal to the generous hearts and minds of healthy American youths. These boys--fired with the zeal of other Theophanes--would naturally come to prepare in a college named after their great model. Such a model and almost contemporary ideal has inspired American youths to such an extent that the future of missionary endeavor looks not only promising but optimistic as well. The Venard has and is continuing to fulfill the hopes of its founders."

Now, let me read a brief passage from the Fall 1936 issue of the same publication: "...many things are remarkable about the Venard student body. First it is cosmopolitan in character; among our ranks we number representatives from every state of the Union and from Hawaii. If we take advantage of it, this situation should be productive of an universal outlook in us; one that is so necessary for the foreign missionary. Secondly there is the spirit, remarkable not only in the Venard but in the whole Society. This spirit is one of humor and genuine fraternity; to instill this spirit in the newcomer is the duty of the old students; the task of the new men is to carry it on. For example, in that last pork chop on the dinner platter, in that last opportunity for a game of hand-ball during the afternoon recreation period, in that seat around the radio, in that extra prayer in chapel, in helping that fellow in difficulty Maryknoll fraternity is found. The Society's prayers are its actions; humor is its language. This humor consists not in frivolity but in the exuberance of spirit unique to those in the service of Our Lord.

"Most of the students here have entered this year upon a new mode of life and thought. In this studies, manual labor and sports--all subjected to spirituality--will play important parts. Through studies we acquire culture and learning in order that we may mingle with the litterateurs of the world; in manual labor we acquire healthy bodies for the task of preaching the Gospel. By means of all three we come closer to God. And this--the sanctification of each member of the Society--is the primary task of Maryknoll."

Please note that this property was never used for a monastery. No monks lived here. It was always used for educational purposes. I thought you might be interested in learning how and why the school known as the Venard came into being. One of the Maryknoll Missioners, James M. Logue, was kind enough to write for my use an article which he called "A Short History of the Venard.."

[Insert here the "Short History of the Venard " by Logue]

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE VENARD

When Maryknoll was established by the Catholic Bishops in 1911, it was recommended that a minor seminary be established also; since Latin was not a major course in the majority of American high schools, and since it was the language used in the major seminary for Philosophy and Theology it was felt that the only practical solution to the problem was to "do it yourself". Bishop Michael Hoban, of Scranton, had been one of the most interested in the foreign mission idea, and he invited Maryknoll to establish the school in his Diocese of Scranton.

Maryknoll in New York opened its first classes in September of 1912 and the following year the Venard Apostolic School was inaugurated in a rented house on Clay Avenue in Scranton. The six students were sent to the Jesuit College of St. Thomas, which later became the University of Scranton. Two years later the students were moved to New York and a search began for a more appropriate site in the Diocese of Scranton.

In 1916 the Maryknoll Superior examined a score of possible properties, but a letter from Fr. Edward Flood, pastor of Our Lady of the Snows Parish in Clarks Summit, brought to his notice the Willow Brook Farm in Clarks Summit, owned by Archibald C. Courtwright, and the property was bought on April 25, 1916. It comprised 135 acres, the farm house, a large rectangular barn, a well, pond, ice-house, chicken and pig houses. There were 50 acres of plow land, 40 acres of timothy, 25 acres of pasture and an orchard. The recently ordained Father (later Bishop) James E. Walsh, arrived with five of the former Clay Avenue students to take possession of the new Maryknoll establishment, on July 10, 1916. Later on the same day the first Maryknoll Brother, Thomas McCann, arrived and the work of converting a farmhouse into a boarding school began. Three weeks later an ancient Model-T truck lurched into the farmyard and discharged its cargo of furniture, pigs, chickens, and four theologians from Maryknoll to help the younger students rehabilitate the place. Fortunately, one of the new arrivals, Bernie Meyer, was a born and bred farmer from Iowa. He spent a week teaching the boys from the sidewalks of many East Coast cities how to take care of the pigs, chickens and cows. He also hired two local farmers to take care of the field work.

School opened on September 8, 1916, with a faculty of four and a student body of 29, ranging from first year high school to second year college. The Maryknoll innovation was the addition of one hour of manual labor every day to the regular school schedule, with the result that any improvements on the property (except, of course, those which demanded professional efforts in construction, plumbing, electricity, etc.) were done by the students during the next 50 years.

In 1917 there were 36 students and when 40 arrived for the 1918 opening the first brick building was built and served until 1921, when the first half of the main building was finished. In 1929 the south wing was completed to accommodate 160 students. From 1918 to 1954 the Maryknoll Sisters attended to the cooking and the laundry. Maryknoll Brothers replaced the hired field hands, and students were on call for any work that did not interfere with studies. Camp Venard was inaugurated in the summer of 1925 but the lake was found to be too dirty and dangerous for the campers, so the following year the swimming pool was built by damming the overflow of the lake with a 12-foot wall.

During the great depression of the 30's the farm proved to be the mainstay of the Venard; potatoes, cabbage and squash were the order of the day - every day. Eggs were sold to buy meat; hay was swapped for oats which, after a night of simmering on the banked boilers, would appear in the morning as oatmeal. No one would get up on a winter morning before hearing the machine-gun sound of the steam entering the radiators. It was a great preparation for northern China, as well as for any other mission country. At least a thousand trees - fruit, pines and sugar maples from Vermont, were planted but the cows were sold when it was found more reasonable to buy milk at 6 cents a quart than to attend our small herd.

In 1933 it was decided to make the Venard a four-year college course since Maryknoll could no longer cope with the number of applicants for the Philosophy section. This continued until 1947, when a great number of ex-G.I.'s applied for admission to Maryknoll. The college was moved to Lakewood, N.J. and later to Glen Ellyn, Ill. and the Venard became a high school with special classes for the new candidates who had not a good foundation in Latin, even though they were college students.

The Venard continued with this program until the publication of the "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy" in December, 1963, which made the vernacular the liturgical language of the Church. The changes came slowly, but the days of the Venard were numbered since it was no longer necessary to insist on Latin as a "sine qua non", and it was sold in 1968.

It is a fact that organizations and institutions change as they age. The Maryknoll Society began with a noble task: the evangelization of non-Christians and the building of an indigenous church. By the 1950s, however, that purpose began to change. For the past several years, the Maryknoll missionaries have been staunch proponents of Liberation Theology, that curious blend of religion and Marxist belief. We didn't agree with Catholic theology even when the Maryknoll order majored on evangelistic missionary activities. But we should recognize that, at one time, they were attempting to take seriously the words of Jesus Christ's Great Commission.

Now, just suppose that the Maryknoll Fathers decided to conduct an historical study of the Baptist Bible College of Pennsylvania. What would they discover about us? Are we still turning out missionaries with the dedication of years gone by? Are students attracted to our college because they sincerely want to serve Christ? Are we motivated to Christian ministry? Are we preparing to take the old Gospel message to a new and very needy world? Have we turned over the control of our futures to Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Harvest? Will we seriously consider cross-cultural ministry and actively move in that direction until God redirects us toward other vocations?

In the summer of 1994 the Association of Baptists for World Evangelism rejoiced in the largest number of missionary candidates it has processed for several years. And I did, too, because my daughter, her husband, and their three children were part of that candidate class. We have been praying them to the mission field. Workers are needed to replace the veterans due to retire. There are openings all over the world for qualified personnel. The missionary workforce needs many of you.

Early next semester, you will have the opportunity to participate in the college Missions Conference. It is my earnest prayer that the Lord will begin to prepare you now for life-changing decisions during that week. Will you join me in praying that a great number of students will make themselves available to God as missionaries.