

Dr. D. Blanchard's interview with Maynard Catchings
August 13, 1983

M.C. I have been active with the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen at various periods. My general history is so complicated to abbreviate is hard to do it that way, to give you a synopsis. I can say this: I was educated first in Texas at Prairie View College I got my bachelor's degree. Then went to Howard University where I got my masters and my bachelor of divinity. Then I got married and went to work with the YMCA. In fact it was with this work with the YMCA where I met my wife, who worked with the YWCA. And then we first went to work down at Fisk University I was with the sociology department under the leadership of Charles Johnson, one of the men who pioneered in race relations in the South, and I worked with him for two or three years. That was right after the Second World War. Racial skirmishes were breaking out all around, mayors and other people were calling for help, so Charles Johnson initiated what he called the Institute of Race Relations, which supplied workers to go into cities and assess the racial situation in that town and try to adapt a procedure which would help move them forward. So we worked in a number of cities: Pittsburgh, Minneapolis-- we were invited to Minneapolis by Hubert Humphrey, who was incensed by the fact--in his book on race, trying to think of the man's name who wrote the book.

D.B. Gunnar Myrdal?

M.C. No it was not Gunnar Myrdal, another singular writer. He had said Minneapolis was the capital of antisemitism. Hubert Humphrey was the mayor and was incensed by this so he called on the University to give assessment in Minneapolis. Then I left there, and took a church in Washington, D.C., United Church of Christ. I was ordained in the U.C.C. At that time it was the Congregational Christian Churches. Before we merged with the

Reformed group. And then I went into YMCA work, and I traveled in about a hundred colleges working on counseling with college presidents to see if we could get some of the general universities to open up to Negro faculty and Negro students, and that sort of thing. Vanderbilt and all the religious schools were then segregated. Many of them by now have opened of their own accord. I stayed at the church about 7 years and came to New York and worked for the national YMCA for about 7 years; then I accepted assignment abroad; so most of the King years I was abroad. I left the U.S. in 1959, I think that was just on the eve of the Martin Luther King leadership period. So most of the 60's I was away and I missed being personally and directly involved in a great deal of what was happening then. Then we came back and I went to work in the field of development of under-developed countries for the Council of Christian Social Action of the United Church of Christ, which the Congregational Christians had become by then. Then from there I went to the National Council of Churches as one of the Associated General Secretaries, then later to the United Church of Christ again, in the World Mission Division, then I retired and have been doing one thing and another in the areas of my training and interest-education, some politics, religion, of course. That's the way I've been trying to make a contribution. Except the last year and a half I've been ill. I suppose Dave told you I was not well right now. About a year and a half ago I came down with a kind of anemic blood situation. And it has been a hanger-onner. It has been hard to get rid of it. To what extent the cancer is present, I can't find out from the doctors. I know it is there and to some extent it is affecting the production of red blood cells, so that is what I have to contend with these days.

D.B. You and I about that should get together - my body produces too many red blood cells, and I have to have them drained off.

M.C. Is that right?

D.B. Just before this trip I had to get two pints taken.

M.C. Well, isn't that wonderful?

D.B. Well, it does not feel that good.

M.C. If I could produce some red blood I would psychologically feel better.

They went into the marrow of the bone and found it was not producing any red blood cells. This was after an operation for a tumor connected with the prostate. Then I had radiotherapy for about 6 weeks. I think it may have created the stuff. Who knows anyway? I have been ailing, and going for regular transfusions. I am a man who lives from transfusion to transfusion. I guess it takes me about two weeks and I have to get back for some more blood. I teasingly told my wife the other day, I feel like a vampire. But anyway, I had a good deal of experience with the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen, and I am sure Nell told you about various people. She would have told you about some of the things we did. Why don't you deal me a little bit of the parameters of what way you want this to go.

D.B. Sure. I have about four pages of questions. It won't take that long. Were you born in Texas?

M.C. I was born in Houston, Texas, in 1914.

D.B. What did your father do?

M.C. He was an educator, my dad was a teacher, he taught school for 45 years and then he stopped teaching school and got a law degree. He did not have an easy time passing the bar but he did law counseling almost until he died. He was 83 when he passed. He had been the first Black manual arts and architectural teacher in the high school in at least two Texas cities, Houston and Hempstead and most of his teaching experience was at the high school in Houston. Then as he grew older he did some work outside in smaller towns.

D.B. What was you mother like?

M.C. My mother, she gave most of her attention to her 5 boys and one girl. But that doesn't mean she did not do a lot of other things. Mama was from a very highly educated family. All of her brothers and sisters had finished college. One brother had finished medical school in Boston. He was practicing medicine in San Antonio, Texas. Her native home was Lockhart, Texas. Not very far from San Antonio. It was direct contrast from my father. He was a self made man. Probably the 7th child out of 13 or 14 children, and the only one who finished college. He had a lot of get-up and a lot of drive and mama used to say she would get embarrassed sometimes because Bob, as papa was called, would often write mama love letters on a postcard. So everybody had read it before it got to her, including the postman. They would all say, "Bessie, I see you got a letter from Bob today." They would tease her about it. She got amused telling the kids about that. She gave her life for the children. There are only two left now. Myself and my second brother, who is a dentist in Detroit. The others have died, from some complication derived from diabetes. Diabetes has run in the family. For some reason I have not had diabetes, but right now I am going through something just as difficult, I think. Myself and my second brother have not had diabetes as yet, and doctors say that after you get 65, it is hardly likely you will get it. So but what I have, I do not need anything added. My mother always taught first grade. The superintendent who knew her personally, as well as her principal, tried on many occasions, to get Mama to move up and take some of the other grades, but I do not know, she was always attached to the children of that age group. She taught first grade for 30 some years, 31 or 32 years. Was so much in love and usually was in a benighted neighborhood and the children were not altogether warm in the winter. We had left home and scattered around the country, gone our various ways. She would empty our trunks and find all

our old clothes at that age and take them and give them to the children. And we would come home and say "Mama, my trunk's empty. Why is that?" "Oh, you were never going to use that stuff anymore, I just gave it to the kids out in the area where I teach." She was very generous with things like that. She was very devoted to my sister who was the youngest and died of leukemia. I was on route back from Singapore where I had told you I had spent some 7 or 8 years but somehow, I did not get back early enough. She passed just before I returned, so I did not get back in time to see her alive.

D.B. When did you first bump into the Fellowship?

M.C. The Fellowship of Southern Churchmen: Do you remember the date when it was founded?

D.B. 1934.

M.C. 1934. I am trying to think. It was after that when I came in contact with it because I finished college in 1935. I had not become acquainted with the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen at that time. It seems to me I became acquainted with the Fellowship after I went to work in Atlanta. I worked in Atlanta for a couple of years before I went to work at Fisk. I mentioned I went to work at Fisk right after I married, and that was about 1943. I think I must have gotten in touch with the Fellowship when I was working for the Southern Field Council of the YMCA and the Southern Field Council of the YMCA was an organization which struggled along working with black and white religious kids in various colleges and trying at the same time to work together with a similar organization in the YWCA. So you see we had to two strikes against us in the South at that time. You did not mix the races and you didn't mix the races sexually. So we had only one or two places back in the early 40's where we could have a conference. One of the big things was like the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen was to have a conference in the summer. At some particular time. So the YM/YWCA was always looking for places where we could meet. One of the few places that

we could meet that was predominantly white ground was Berea College in Kentucky. Then further we met at Talladega College, in Alabama, one of the A.M.E. colleges. Many of our meetings were held out here the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen met out in North Carolina at Black Mountain. And we met once at Black Mountain and at Blue Ridge. I know there was a Blue in there somewhere, in addition to the aryan's blue eyes. We also met in Blue Ridge and that was where at one time they were having white conferences and black conferences to meet at separate times. The group that I was associated with was determined to try to bring these two groups so we could have one single conference. Now the only agency that we had to work with was the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen, that I remember. That was also committed to the same goals and ideals that we were trying to get our whole group to be committed to. Our whole group was not as committed to it as was the Fellowship of Socialist Christians which was the early name for the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen. Scotty Cowan and Buck Kester were the leadership people in it when I went in. Buck Kester and I grew to be very close friends as well as was Scotty. From that time on I made most of their conferences. We would meet around from place to place and I think that group met at Black Mountain at certain times. When he said something along the line our main rationale for being was put pretty well by Charles Jones at one time that one of the things that brings us together is that we have some place to fellowship with people who think as we do. I think that was a very succinct and accurate statement. We were not trying to overturn the South as such but we were trying to do two things: one is to give people who had some conviction about integration favorably, an opportunity to live it out. On the other hand we concerned to give an illustration to the world to give a living witness to what we felt was the way man and womankind should live. We met at many places. I just happen to be thinking about one meeting we held

out at North Carolina. The place we had met before that, all the people had had private baths and private rooms and we went to this place to meet. It was college and it turns out that there was a men's shower room and a women's shower room, so we did not have all the amenities that we had had at some other places that we had met. I remember that Charles Jones used to quip very quickly and had a sharp mind, he still has a sharp mind. Somebody said, "We are at a place now where our accommodations are slightly different from what we've been accustomed to." So Charles said, "Well, this only means we will see more of each other." When men shower they see each other a little bit more. So he would always have something very sharp to say that was humorous as well as carry you over the immediate problematic concern.

D.B. What was the significance of the fellowship for you personally?

M.C. I did not, I was a latecomer to the conviction of integration. My folk, my wife said were kind of middle class Negro people both being teachers and running a grocery store, and things and like I never made a speech or oration to be able to say I remember the time I slept on the doorsteps of a warehouse. I always had a home and food to eat. My wife said I grew up as a middle class Negro boy and therefore it took me longer to become aware of ravages of segregation I think before I left Texas, that would have been before 1935, that it was perfectly well and good that the black folks had their area and the white folks had their area. However, I felt strongly the white folks had no right coming into the black area and the black folks had little right going into the white area except going to serve as cooks and delivery boy if that was the level of your skill. So when I was growing up we used to have fights with the white boys almost nightly. I worked at a drugstore in a white neighborhood in Houston called Montrose which was very "Tpleeish" when the great oilman lived out there. Sometimes when we were coming home on our bicycles some of the white boys from the lower economic level of whites

used to get on their bikes and chase us. Since we would be coming from their level they could outnumber us, and we would ride like the Duke's dickens trying to outrun them and then there was a railroad track as you find in lots of towns and this railroad track was called The Tap Track. When you hit the Tap Track everything turned black. There was a pull away icehouse right there on the track. So we would be running from these white boys, we would hit the Tap Track and let our bicycles skid away from us on the gravel and we would hit the gravel pit and start picking up rocks and gravel and the white boys would start sliding their tires and turning around going back into their section. So that is the kind of attitude that you stay where you supposed to stay and I stay where I was supposed to say. And if I am in your place I'll try to get out of it. So I did not develop a real consciousness about race until. . . I knew there was something wrong about it, but I did not know what exactly it was. Because it was not impeding my development, and what my dad wanted for the children we always seemed to get. We could be out and . . . We'd go by a place, a big beautiful restaurant that we knew didn't serve any Negro people and yet papa would always know if they had Black waiters hopping cars. He would always know some of them because he was the only Black manual Arts teacher in town. So all the boys knew him. So, he would just call one of them and they'd come over to the care and he'd say

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