



# CROSSROADS

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## VON BRAUN SPEAKS AT COMMENCEMENT

**Dr. Wernher Von Braun addressed the 1972 graduating class at Belmont Abbey College. Because we believe his message will be of considerable interest to you, we present it here in its entirety.**

Abbot Edmond, Bishop Borders, Abbot Walter, Father John Bradley, Reverend Clergy, Graduates of the Class of 1972, Honored Guests.

We in NASA have often been asked what the real reason was for the amazing string of successes we had with our Apollo flights to the moon. I think the only honest answer we can give is that we tried to never overlook anything. Let me give you an illustration of what I mean by that.

A few weeks before the launch of Apollo II which carried Neil Armstrong's team to the lunar surface, I found myself in a position comparable to that of a ship captain whose boat is in drydock. We had delivered our Saturn V rocket to our Launch Operations Center at Cape Kennedy where they stacked the various rocket stages and spacecraft modules and checked out the whole unit. There was nothing for me to do but wait. Since it was pretty obvious that the period after the launching would be pretty hectic regardless of whether the flight met with success or failure, I decided that this was a golden opportunity to take a little vacation and so my family and I embarked on a cruise through the

Greek Islands. During this cruise we also visited the famous site of the Delphi Oracle to which since antiquity generals and statesmen would make their pilgrimage to find out what the future held in store for them.

The beautiful park of Delphi is also the home of a famous Apollo temple.

When we left the park, a Greek newspaperman who must have been trailing us buttonholed me and asked, "Dr. von Braun, what

in the world are you doing here in Delphi three weeks before your rocket will carry men to the moon?" I replied, "Of course, I wanted to hear from the Oracle whether we will have a successful operation and I also wanted to pay my respects to Apollo, the patron saint of our project."

He wrote a little story about this incident in his Greek newspaper which was promptly picked up by Time magazine in their well-known column "People and Events." A few days later a stranger came storming into the office of Dr. Thomas Paine who was then my boss and the Administrator of NASA, and asked, "Dr. Paine, do you approve of your Wernher von Braun placating ancient gods to ask for success in your moon program?" Dr. Paine replied with a deadpan face, "You don't worry about that; we've just sent Frank Borman to the Pope so all bets are covered."

Our program of space exploration is simply the latest chapter in a continuing scientific revolution that dates back to Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo. It was their observations, and their ability to draw inferences from what they saw, that moved the Earth from its exalted position as the center of the universe. That was a profound blow to the human ego, and it called for some very painful reassessments of man's place in the universe. But it was a very

See VON BRAUN, Page 6



## The Identity of Belmont Abbey College

BY Rev. John P. Bradley

One of the greatest problems of our complex, technological society is its growing impersonalism. In today's society, alas, many of us find it more and more difficult to retain a sense of our identity as persons, each with his own individual dignity and worth. It is perhaps understandable, then, that there has developed in recent times a sort of backlash: more and more people are unfortunately reacting to the impersonalism of present-day society by rejecting society and devoting themselves almost exclusively to their own personal interests. In other words, as is usual with any

backlash, there is a moving from one extreme to another. An excessive preoccupation with self is no more acceptable than the impersonalism we complain of. Nevertheless, what we are seeing today should convince us of the utter importance of every human being's need to be able to establish and maintain his identity and to have a healthy appreciation of his own identity and worth.

This is true not only in the case of individual persons, but also in the case of a college. For after all a college is simply a group of persons who have come together to pursue certain educational goals. A college, then, cannot, any more than an individual

person, function properly without a sure grasp of its identity.

In my opinion, many church-related colleges, Belmont Abbey College included, have gradually become less sure of their identity and, consequently, less clear about their goals and purposes. If this is so, these colleges leave themselves open to some pointed questions: How do you differ from other colleges? Why should students attend your college rather than, say, a state-supported college where tuition is much cheaper?

There are, of course, various answers that can be given to these and similar questions, but

See IDENTITY Page 8

from  
the  
President

