

# INSIGHT

By FR. JOHN P. BRADLEY

The following piece consists of excerpts from the article titled "Laity" by Mr. Hugh Kay, which appears in Volume 8 of the 10-volume *The Catholic Layman's Library*. Published by Good Will Publishers, Inc., this work was edited by Father John P. Bradley, President of Belmont Abbey College, and places emphasis on the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. In its preparation Father Bradley enlisted contributors from many parts of the world. CROSSROADS thanks Good Will Publishers, Inc. for permission to use the following excerpts.

Few factors have more consistently weakened the church's impact on the world than its own interior fragmentation: the division of clergy and laity into castes. Even where the relationship has been benign, priest and people have been alienated.

Clericalism, redolent of social privilege, has for its motif a paternalism fatal to fatherhood, an authoritarian structure bringing authority into disrepute, and an all-embracing control dimming the layman's sense of missionary obligation.

To such divisions, a lay propensity to adulation, to treating the priest as a father-figure whose duty it is to bear all the burdens and make all the moral decisions, has contributed every bit as much as the layman's frequent waywardness. The worst result has been to paralyze the layman's conscience and activity, to foster the notion that the mechanics of grace are much the same as alchemy, and to introduce the note of automatism into the life of faith.

The Second Vatican Council has summed up in a simple sentence the situation as it ought to be. In its *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests* (No. 6) it says this of the priests: "In the name of their bishop...they gather the family of God together into one united brotherhood. In union with the Holy Spirit they lead them through Christ to God the Father."

The root of the problem lies in a misunderstanding of the church's nature and the layman's share in it. The church is not a professional body of clerics adhered to by a lay majority on the periphery. The truth was laid bare by Pope Pius XII in an allocution to new cardinals:

The church is the society of those who, under the supernatural influence of grace, in the perfection of their personal dignity as sons of God and in the harmonious development of every human bent and energy, build up the mighty framework of the community of men. From this aspect, Venerable Brethren, the faithful, and more precisely the laity, are in the front line of the church's life; through them, the church is the vital principle of human society. Consequently, they particularly must have an ever more clear consciousness, not only of belonging to the church, but of being the church, that is the community of the faithful on earth under the guidance of the common head, the pope, and of the bishops in communion with him.

There was initially some excuse for clericalism, arising as it did from the need for a professional reply to a skeptical world determined to secularize society and exclude the supernatural. But in this state of confrontation the accent fell on the hierarchical church instead of the "community of the faithful"; on the organizational church, not on a "people" endowed with a kingly priesthood, charismatic and prophetic.

The language of law seemed almost to replace the voice of the Spirit who "cries in our hearts." The church stood out as a power structure, not a fellowship. It sought to make common cause with secular knowledge and values through the priest-scientist, later through the priest-worker and what has been described as the clericalized lay organization. But the layman continued to see himself and be seen as merely a helper.

This tendency was not unconnected with a profound distrust of the world, an attitude productive of opposing errors. On the one hand, a pre-Renaissance spirituality not untainted with early heresy regarded

the world as a place of exile for the spiritual man. Spiritual detachment was conceived, not as Christian "unworldliness," but as an aloofness from a world the soul hoped to escape from into salvation. The pilgrim sought heaven not by way of God's creation, but in spite of it, outlawed as it was by the taint of original sin.

On the other hand, a medieval concept urged the church to absorb and wholly control the secular world and, when this was seen to have totally failed, the ecclesiastic simply took his place as gladiator in the political arena.

The beginnings of rediscovered wisdom came with Leo XIII's encyclical, *Immortale Dei*, which marked the boundaries of the spiritual and temporal sovereignties. Then came Pius XI's call to Catholic Action and commitment to the lay apostolate, a theme further developed by Pius XII. Meanwhile, an evolving theology, now enshrined in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, was establishing an authentic perspective.

This theology places emphasis on the truth that the supernatural is not a sign of contradiction to the natural. Rather, the order of creation is to be fertilized and sanctified by the order of redemption. This is a community task to be effected by the whole church, the people of God, and one from which not one single Christian dare absent himself; it is a task which no clerical elite can tackle alone. It is not just a question of numbers, but of the missionary task directly imposed on each Christian personally by Christ in baptism and confirmation.

The task of the Christian, be he cleric or layman, is to consecrate himself and the world around him to God. Every Christian act, provided it expresses man's hunger for God and helps men to share God's life, has a value that can be incorporated into the sacrifice of the Mass; and the Mass is deprived of meaning unless it be the act of the Christian community incorporated into the sacramental Christ.

The layman's apostolic role is not to usurp temporal authority, but to influence the temporal order toward God, to integrate modern secular values into Christian values, and to make the community Christ-oriented, ready to receive the fullness of the gift of God in the church.

The layman's task is to bring his Christ-informed mind to bear on the world's problems. His spiritual insights are to blend with his secular knowledge to make him a catalyst for social construction and reform. As the late Cardinal Suhard urged, such a Christian must think fast in a world that has discovered speed and broken away from us. A Christian's inventiveness should make him a pioneer, not a follower....

The church is not a democracy, and the laity's functions are not deliberative. But the layman enjoys a kind of complementary authority by virtue of the apostolic character received in baptism and confirmation, and also by virtue of his expertise. This "authority" is not derived from an episcopal mandate, but is exercised in dialogue with and ultimate submission to the hierarchy....

Opening its discussion on the status and mission of the laity, Vatican II's *Constitution on the Church* (No. 31) describes the laity as those faithful who are "by baptism made one body with Christ and are established among the people of God. They are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ. They carry out their own part in the mission of the whole Christian people with respect to the church and the world."

It is the laity's vocation to "seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God," so that, "by exercising their proper function and being led by the spirit of the gospel they can work for the sanctification of the world from within, in the manner of leaven" (No. 31).

Though some members of the church are appointed as teachers, dispensers of mysteries, and shepherds, "all share a true equality with regard to the dignity and activity common to all the faithful for the building up of the Body of Christ" (No. 32).

The lay apostolate is "a participation in the saving mission of the church itself," and "through their baptism and confirmation all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself." In a special way the laity are called "to make the church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can she become the salt of the earth" (No. 33).

## In Memoriam

R. GRADY RANKIN

R. Grady Rankin, Esteemed friend and first Chairman of the Board of Advisors of Belmont Abbey College, died July 13. He was 75.

He is survived by two sons, R. Grady Rankin Jr., of Naples, Florida, and David H. Rankin of Charlotte; one daughter, Mrs. Joseph W. Lineberger of Belmont; two brothers, Lawrence S. Rankin, Sr., of Gastonia and R. Pinkney Rankin, Sr., of Charlotte. His wife, the former Ruth Boyce, preceded him in death.

Mr. Rankin received an honorary Doctor of Laws degree at the Abbey in 1958. He was a respected civic leader and served Gaston County as a member of the County Board of Commissioners and treasurer of the City of Gastonia. He was a member of the North Carolina Board of Conservation and Development, a member of the North Carolina Senate and president pro tem, and Man of the Year of the N. C. Citizens Association in 1960.

The family requested that in lieu of flowers, contributions be made to Belmont Abbey College, the Presbyterian Home of Charlotte, or the Board of Pensions of the Western North Carolina Conference of United Methodist Churches.

MRS. BERNICE MOORE

Mrs. Bernice Moore, 57, of 115 Belmont Road, died Sunday, July 18 at her home.

She is survived by her husband, William Moore, 4 sons, Solister Moore, and William Moore, Jr., both of Charlotte, and Raymond and Bryant, both of Belmont; 6 daughters, Mrs. Rhetta Bass of Charlotte, and Misses Betty, Nevesa, Pamela, and Theresa Moore, and Mrs. Deborah Lockhart, all of Belmont; 3 brothers and 2 sister, all of Belmont.

Funeral services were held Thursday, July 22 at 2:00 p.m. at O'Connor A.M.E. Zion Church, followed by burial at Henry's Chapel A. M. E. Zion Church Cemetery.

Bernice's dedication to the Abbey for the past 24 years will be greatly missed as will her happy humming while she went about her specialty, baking.