

About Mark Gibbs



Mark Gibbs was an English schoolmaster who became an international spokesperson for the ministry of the laity. Born in 1920 and educated at University College of London, he taught history and economics at the Audenshaw Grammar School in Manchester from 1946-1964. While teaching, he became involved in the then-emerging European laity movement. In 1958 he was named chair of the International Committee of the German Protestant Kirchentag, a post he held for 20 years. With T. Ralph Morton, deputy leader of the renowned Iona Community, Gibbs published *God's Frozen People* in 1964. That same year he left the school to launch with Morton the Audenshaw Foundation, whose objective was to “encourage the support, education and development of the laity – in all the churches and outside them – as they struggle to understand and apply the Christian faith in the everyday world of today and tomorrow.”

In their second book, *God's Lively People* (1971), Gibbs and Morton declared that “the whole institutional church must recognize, in its organization and in its setting of priorities, that what ‘world-oriented’ Christians do, be they young or old, in their daily work and study and service and leisure is *their proper vocation under Christ, and in no sense inferior or less important than ‘church work.’*” Their provocative perspective challenged church hierarchy and prompted laypeople to claim their ministries in secular life.

Gibbs met the leaders of Vesper Society several years after the founding of the innovative nonprofit group in 1965. In the Society, Gibbs found kindred spirits and an organization eager to use his gifts in writing, speaking and networking to engage laypeople. A contractual relationship ensued in which the Society provided a modest stipend and covered Gibbs’ travel expenses.

In their 16-year relationship, Gibbs and Vesper Society profoundly shaped the laity movement. They convened groundbreaking conversations on pressing social issues with church, academic, business and political leaders, and the conversations prompted significant initiatives in the U.S. and abroad. With Gibbs as editor, the Society published *Vesper Exchange*, a compendium of reprinted articles on political, cultural and economic life, and *Laity Exchange*, a collection of essays and resources for the laity movement.

Gibbs’ final book, *Christians with Secular Power*, was published in 1981. The book was part of the Laity Exchange series that Gibbs edited for Fortress Press. An Anglican, he wrote in an era of institutional church decline and called church leaders to task for their failure to embrace the

ministry of the laity. (See his 1981 lecture “The Development of A Strong and Committed Laity.”) But he held out hope that the church could adapt: “(W)e still have a chance to develop an adult, mature, strong, dogged, determined, able laity which ‘having done all may still stand,’” he said in his 1982 lecture “No More Spiritual Babies.”

Gibbs’ writing inspired thousands and influenced clergy and laity across the globe. He died in 1986 after a long battle with cancer. His friends and readers remember him as a prophet whose sharp critique of the church flowed from his love of the church and his abiding belief in the “marvelous vocation” of all human beings to be “citizens of the Kingdom and the People of God.”