

Priest to loom large in church history

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

Six and a half years ago I did a column to mark the impending retirement of Father Theodore M. Hesburgh, CSC, as president of the University of Notre Dame. He served in that post for 35 years, bringing growth and distinction to the school and an uncommon quality of leadership to Catholic higher education in the United States.

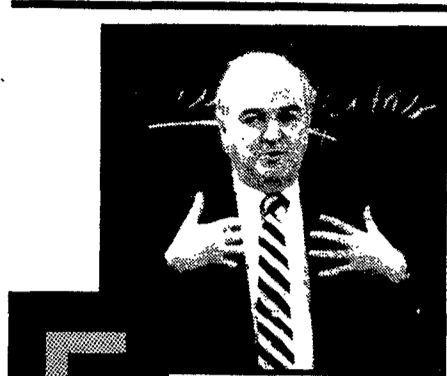
As I write these lines, Father Hesburgh is preparing to celebrate this very afternoon a Mass of Thanksgiving to mark his 50th anniversary of ordination to the priesthood.

During the many interviews he endured just before his retirement from the Notre Dame presidency, Father Hesburgh was frequently asked to name the personal accomplishment in which he took the most pride.

He had been, after all, an adviser to U.S. presidents (with 14 presidential appointments to his credit), rendered service to four popes (and was a close friend of Paul VI), headed a national commission to untangle the immigration problem, and worked tirelessly for arms control and civil rights.

His answer to such questions was always the same. "I am a priest, first, last, and always," or words to that effect.

Although Father Ted Hesburgh was frequently regarded by many as a "liberal" because of his activities on



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behalf of causes like civil rights, arms control, and academic freedom, and because of his strong and unstinting support of the theology department at Notre Dame, he was and remains a traditional, mainstream Catholic and faithful priest.

Daily Mass and the daily recitation of the Liturgy of the Hours (the Breviary) are as natural a part of his day as eating and sleeping.

If given the option, he would not have married, although he would grant the option to others had he the power to do so.

Although he knows how to relax when "off duty," he never appears at a public function without his Roman collar, whether at a simple restaurant in South Bend or while fishing on a

lake in northern Wisconsin where the university has recreational facilities.

His private life is marked by an extraordinary modesty and simplicity. And, yes, he still lives in a couple of small rooms — no bigger than those of any of the other priests — and they're right over a dump.

Perhaps it is this obviously traditional side that wins him support from many who are more conservative than he. Harry Reasoner, the late CBS commentator, once said how much he admired Father Hesburgh for his ability to get "all that money" from so many well-heeled conservatives, and make them enjoy giving it.

People of all points of view respond to him that way. When he enters a room, you know a significant person has joined the group. Not because he's pompous or overbearing. He's just the opposite.

It's because there is a quality in the man that touches people and a presence that invites them to take him seriously.

Leadership fits him like a glove," I wrote in that column in November, 1986. "He has an exceptional capacity to motivate people to do more than they think they can do, and an uncanny ability to make them feel as if they've accomplished even more than they have."

Some of his brother priests at Corby Hall (the main on-campus residence of the Holy Cross priests at Notre Dame) would chuckle at such remarks. They know Ted as a friend

and colleague who, when he sits at meals with them, tends to dominate the conversation, regaling them with stories and commentaries that they claim they've heard many times over.

But to paraphrase the Scriptures, great people are honored and appreciated save in their own country and among their own kinds. It's not that his own don't realize what an extraordinary man he is, but they're too close to him to see him as so many others do. Which is not to say that all those who see him up close tend to be less impressed than those who see him from afar. Many of us who have had the opportunity to work with him for an extended period of years will testify that "what you see is what you get." The private Hesburgh and the public Hesburgh are one and the same.

Father Ted Hesburgh, I wrote some six and a half years ago, is one of U.S. Catholicism's proudest boasts. He symbolizes everything we American Catholics have always aspired to be.

I would modify that judgment only slightly today. He is a source of pride not only for the church in the United States, but for the universal church as well. When the history of 20th-century Catholicism is written in the next century, the name of Theodore M. Hesburgh will loom large upon its pages.

But he would want to be remembered — first, last, and always — as a priest. After 50 years he's proved that he's a great one.

Try to adopt 'worker-friendly family policies'

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce
Syndicated columnist

Employers are under increasing pressure to help their workers deal with a variety of familial problems, including child and elder care, divorce, health insurance, education, housing, even addictions and mental illness.

The U.S. Congress' debate over and passage of the family leave bill has focused attention on such "family-friendly work policies."

Less attention has been paid to what might be called "worker-friendly family policies." These are attitudes, decisions, and ways of operating in a family that would take into account work's pressures and demands on family members, helping them to better cope with and perform their jobs.

The decision, for example, about where a family is to live is usually



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made on the basis of what is best for the children: where will they get the best education, meet the most friends their age, be safest or healthiest. Often

this means, however, that one or more workers in the family have to commute an hour or more each day.

Such commuters often arrive at their workplaces hassled and tense, in no condition to offer their employers their full talents, and arrive home exhausted and crabby, unable to give their families the love and involvement they need and deserve.

Maybe families ought to take commuting distance into account equally with other family concerns in choosing where to live.

Certainly when a family member works late or goes out of town on business, it is difficult for the rest of the family. But it is also difficult for the worker if the family does not understand and support his or her need to do the extra work.

Perhaps a family could get together and — without complaint — do some of the overtime worker's household chores or plan a special meal or event

when the person returns home.

One worker-friendly family policy is the "before-dinner nap," when the husband-father (and now just as often the wife-mother) is given a few minutes alone before supper to put his/her feet up and relax.

Even the simple opportunity for workers to complain about their jobs or bosses is something that a family needs to provide its working members. Sometimes it is only a matter of letting the person blow off steam. In addition, families must support the worker's decision to try to bring about changes in his or her workplace or even to quit a job altogether and look for new work.

The most important worker-friendly family policy is for the family to truly value and support the work that each member performs and to do everything possible to make that work fulfilling and productive — that is, holy.

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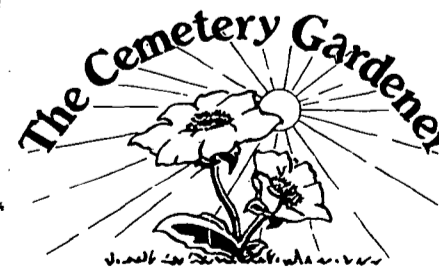


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