

COLUMNISTS

Msgr. George Higgins, 86, workers' advocate

Msgr. George Higgins, the U.S. Catholic Church's most outspoken advocate of the rights of working people and particularly of their right to unionize, died - fittingly - on May 1, the feast of St. Joseph the Worker. He was 86.

Msgr. Higgins, ordained in 1940, was a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago. He received a doctorate in labor economics at The Catholic University of America in 1944 and was appointed almost immediately to the Social Action Department of what used to be called the National Catholic Welfare Conference.

He remained there for 36 years, having become department director in 1954. He remained in Washington as a lecturer at Catholic University, from which base he continued his writing and lecturing.

Higgins was often referred to in those early years as the "labor priests' priest," back when labor schools were conducted by priests specializing in labor-related issues. The schools taught workers Catholic social doctrine, their legal rights and the most effective ways to form unions, especially in the teeth of determined opposition from management.

A leading figure in this group and close associate of Higgins in support of California farm workers, Joseph Donnelly, became auxiliary bishop in my own



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

Archdiocese of Hartford, Conn., after serving for years as chairman of that state's Board of Arbitration and Mediation.

George Higgins' interests, however, ranged far beyond labor-management issues - race relations, international affairs (traveling to Poland, for example, to support the fledgling Solidarity movement), and ecumenical and interfaith activities.

He was in the forefront of efforts to promote dialogue between Catholics and Jews, having encouraged the establishment of an office on Catholic-Jewish relations in the bishops' national headquarters. Last June he was honored by an international committee as one of eight great living pioneers of the Catholic-Jewish dialogue worldwide.

His support of the Vietnam War and of anti-Communism in the 1960s mirrored

the views of the U.S. labor movement at the time, but there was a radical consistency in those views with the social teaching of the church. Higgins argued that the most effective way of opposing Communism was by working to overcome the social, economic and political conditions that fueled its cause.

During the Second Vatican Council he served as a *peritus* (expert) for the U.S. bishops, especially for religious liberty, the church in the modern world, and the church's relations with non-Christian religions. He gloried in late-night discussion with the council's varied participants.

He was a voracious reader and a prodigious correspondent. For 56 years he wrote a weekly syndicated column, "The Yardstick." As a seminarian and later as a columnist, I read it faithfully. (My column, begun in 1966, would need to run another 20 years to equal Higgins' record.)

His close friend and eulogist, Father Charles Curran, formerly of Catholic University, now a professor at Southern Methodist, has indicated that George Higgins had less ego needs than anyone else he knew. One story is illustrative.

A visiting priest spent three hours with Msgr. Higgins on the day before he was to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom at the White House. Two days later

the priest found out about this extraordinary honor by reading the front page of *The Washington Post* on the airplane while traveling home.

Father Curran also testified to Higgins' "quiet and deep spirituality." He was traditional in his devotional life but would never speak about it publicly. Once, after reading a letter from his own bishop to his priests about the bishop's spiritual life, Higgins commented: "He ought to just do it and not tell people about it."

Bad hips interfered with George's mobility during his last years of life, but he continued to travel, patiently waiting for wheelchairs in airports throughout the country. The onset of macular degeneration severely compromised his ability to read, so he turned to audio tapes.

George Higgins was someone I have always looked up to as a model for my own work. Even though I saw him relatively infrequently, he was always a solid rock of support and encouragement when needed.

Church and society alike have been deeply enriched by his presence among us.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

No vocation is higher than being a priest of Christ

The Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi) (June 2): (R3) John 6:51-58; (R1) Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14-16; (R2) 1 Corinthians 10:16-17.

Since the priesthood has been so much in the media, I feel I must devote my articles in June to the same subject.

What shall I be when I grow up? That is a question most young people ask themselves. They toy with the answer until they finish school or college. Then they begin to realize that a definite choice has to be made. The decision will not depend just on one's personal satisfaction.

One of the first things that strike one is that there are others to be considered in our choice. We all are members of a human family. As in one's own family where one learns about mutual service, so in the family of society one learns he cannot live for himself alone. All work toward the welfare of others. This aspect of life makes it clear to every lad that in thinking of a career he must choose one that brings not only happiness and profit for himself, but great good to his fellow men.

For Catholics, there is more to be considered. What is God's will for me? God has a plan for each of us above our personal and social objectives. We must seek to discover that plan. St. Paul prayed,



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

"Lord, what will thou have me do?"

No honor or glory is so great as Catholic priesthood, being called by the Son of God to be his special friend, even his "other self." By this vocation he is lifted up above all local and earthly interests.

Our Lord entrusts to priests his most precious treasure on earth, the sacrament of his body and blood, the holy Eucharist. In addition he calls a priest to love everyone, to grant access to God's mercy in the sacrament of penance. Through him eternal salvation is made possible to all.

Lacordaire described a priest as one called "to live in the midst of the world without wishing its pleasures. To be a member of each family, yet belonging to none. To share all sufferings; to penetrate all secrets; to heal all wounds; to go from

men to God and offer him their prayers; to return from God to man to bring pardon and hope; to have a heart of fire for charity and a heart of bronze for chastity; to teach, console and bless always. My God, what a life! And it is yours, O Priest of Jesus Christ."

There is no vocation in life higher than that of being a priest of Jesus Christ!

The priesthood is a favor bestowed by God. To the Apostles and their successors Christ gave his own mission, "As the Father sent me so I send you" (Jn 20:21). He conferred on them the power to forgive sins, to celebrate the Eucharist, to teach all nations. Catholic priesthood is not a shadow of Christ's eternal priesthood as it was for the Jews in the Old Testament. The Catholic priest is another Christ!

Speaking to the Apostles, Jesus said that for the sake of God's kingdom some would renounce even marriage itself (Mt 19:11-13). St. Paul led a life of celibacy and said, "I wish everyone to be as I am" (1 Cor 7:7), adding "An unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord. Whereas a married man is anxious about the things of the world, how he may please his wife." (1 Cor 7:32)

The great object of a priest's life is love

of God and zeal for souls. So powerful are these interests that the priest sheds all other ties. Thus celibacy is the honor of the priesthood, the joy of the faithful and a power for immense good in the church.

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, June 3

2 Peter 1:2-7; Psalms 91:1-2, 14-16; Mark 12:1-12

Tuesday, June 4

2 Peter 3:12-15A, 17-18; Psalms 90:2-4, 10; Mark 12:13-17

Wednesday, June 5

2 Timothy 1:1-3, 6-12; Psalms 123:1-2; Mark 12:18-27

Thursday, June 6

2 Timothy 2:8-15; Psalms 25:4-5, 8-10, 14; Mark 12:28B-34

Friday, June 7

Deuteronomy 7:6-11; Psalms 103:1-4, 6-8, 10; 1 John 4:7-16; Matthew 11:25-30

Saturday, June 8

2 Timothy 4:1-8; Psalms 71:8-9, 14-17, 22; Luke 2:41-51

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THE SOLEMNITY OF THE BODY & BLOOD OF CHRIST

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12:30 pm Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament

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