

[1984?]

May I confess at the outset of this personal account that it is difficult, if not impossible, to write of oneself or one's activity without straining objectivity and, at times, credulity. However, I cannot make the point that needs to be made without at first giving this personal account, as requested by the Editors of this book. Please bear with me.

I can hardly remember a time during the last thirty years when I was not doing one or two or even three different tasks for the federal government and, one would hope, for the common public and private good as well. In fact, I added up the years of service, admittedly part time, and they came to forty-five.

It began during President Eisenhower's administration. Sherman Adams called from the White House one Sunday afternoon in 1954 and asked if I would, if appointed, accept an appointment to the National Science Board, a group of twenty-four persons, mostly scientists of national reputation, who govern the National Science Foundation which had been established by the Congress in 1950 to promote fundamental scientific research and education. I responded that my education had centered on philosophy and theology, not science. Surprisingly, he said that President Eisenhower wanted a philosophical and theological dimension represented on the National Science Board. "Well," I said, "if they can stand some philosophical and theological observations, I can certainly learn a great deal about science."

Twelve years later, after serving the maximum two statutory terms of six years each, I could honestly say it really happened that way. I had learned much from the experience, having passed through the atomic revolution, the space revolution, and the beginnings of the electronic and biological revolutions in science. Before, it had largely been a terra incognita. From all of the personal friendships with many of the world's greatest scientists involved, my life was enriched and still is, as we now join arms again against the nuclear threat to humanity. Obviously, the experience and learning enhanced my capabilities as President of a major research university (one of the few Catholic universities worldwide in this category) and prepared me to represent the Holy See for fifteen years as its Permanent Representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency (Atoms for Peace) whose headquarters are in Vienna.

As Chairman of the National Science Board's International Science Committee, I found myself on occasion exercising my priestly ministry, hearing confessions, preaching and offering Mass at remote Antarctic posts, including the South Pole, while carrying out other official duties. Some might argue that Church and State were confused here, but there was a warm welcome and no complaints everywhere I appeared.

As Chairman of the Board's Committee on Social Science, I was able, against the strong opposition of many Board members,

mostly natural and physical scientists, to institute a program and eventually a well-supported Office for Social Science Research and Education. It is still well and healthy today, although often under fire.

Three years after this National Science Board appointment, I had another call from the White House in the Fall of 1957, asking if I would accept appointment to the newly-created U. S. Commission on Civil Rights. There were to be six members, three from either political party. After consulting my Provincial Superior and obtaining his permission, I agreed. Later they called back to ask my political affiliation; they had already appointed three Republicans. I told them I was politically an Independent, so I was put into a Democratic slot. The opposite happened later when the Democrats were in power. They substituted me for a Republican slot, although, in fact, I was neither.

We Commissioners were sworn in at the White House for what was then considered to be a two-year term. Fifteen years later, as President Nixon was re-elected for a second term, I was abruptly terminated. He had named me Chairman of the Commission when he assumed the Presidency in 1969. He had also asked me to become Director of the War on Poverty Program, but it had become so politicized in the large cities that it seemed inappropriate for me to do that as a priest, so I declined. He appointed Donald Rumsfeld who subsequently became Secretary of Defense.

I should say for the record that I had, as Chairman of the Civil Rights Commission, leaned quite heavily on the administration which explains my dismissal. A few days later, I also submitted to the President my resignation as a Commissioner. It seemed proper not to be looking over the shoulder of the new Chairman.

I cannot think of any moral task of greater importance to America during those years than the task that faced the Commission: to create new laws and new legal structures, a new equal opportunity for those then denied it in the area of voting, education, employment, public accommodations, and in the administration of justice.

We held public hearings throughout the United States, but, especially, in trouble spots. We published over a hundred volumes of studies in all areas of concern. Over seventy per cent of our recommendations (almost all highly controversial) were enacted into federal law during the decade of the sixties. The federal civil rights legislation of 1964, 1965, and 1968 changed the face of the nation. To our original mandate to enlarge equal opportunity for those denied it by reason of color, race, religion, or national origin, I was able during my time as Chairman, to add sex to the list. Subsequently, age was added as well, by my successor as Chairman, Arthur Flemming.

I found the years of service on the Civil Rights Commission enormously rewarding as a priest, as well as an American citizen. We were able to really change America by totally eliminating peacefully (most of the time) and by law, a system of apartheid every bit as bad as South Africa's, despite the fact that we have more blacks in America than any African state, except Nigeria.

I really believe that the struggle for racial justice and the creation of legal structures to counter centuries-old prejudice was a priestly work. I found that just by being a priest, I was, through no merit of my own, endowed with great moral authority in the eyes of my colleagues. I must say that I encountered very few Catholics on our staff or State Committees, but they were all very happy to work with me because I could speak as no other Commissioner could, from a moral and spiritual base that was unique -- and very necessary. They gladly printed my minority statements in our annual reports, and were forever urging me to elaborate the religious and moral dimensions to whatever problem we were discussing in public hearings. When the situation really became tense during some of our hearings, the staff would pass me a note on yellow legal paper saying, "Give them the theological reason why Christians should practice racial justice. That will settle things down because they are fundamentally good people." After one of these tense hearings, a Southern Governor said to me: "You really bother me because I'm a Christian, son of a minister, and I know you're right and I'm wrong, but it is so hard to change my ways."

I know that subsequently there were many priests and religious men and women involved in the civil rights movement, but in the late fifties and early sixties, it was a lonely spot for a priest to be, especially in the South. Even so, looking back over my forty years

as a priest, those fifteen years of service on the Commission were among my most priestly and apostolic -- I do not regret one single day of this service.

During the Kennedy years, I was given an additional task to those two already mentioned: membership on a State Department Commission on International ^{Educational} and Cultural Exchange, chaired by John Gardner. This lasted about three years. We produced a slim volume, Beacon of Hope, which is still relevant in this area. Again, my main task at the University was enhanced, and I was able to be a better Board member of the private Institute for International Education and the Rockefeller Foundation Board. These were intertwining circles, each one enforcing the others.

During the Johnson years, I served briefly on the Commission to study International Economic Development in the Third World (the Perkins Commission) and on the Policy Planning Board of the State Department, as well as continuing on the Civil Rights Commission. At least my mother was happy when Lyndon Johnson gave me the Medal of Freedom at the White House in her presence.

During the Nixon years, in addition to the Chairmanship of the Civil Rights Commission, I was appointed to the (Gates) Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Forces, which was legislated by Congress following our report. It also alleviated the Vietnam tension aggravated by the military draft. This volunteer situation is still in force and working reasonably well for the military. I had an easier time in the University once the draft was dropped.

During the Ford years, I was appointed to a nine-person Amnesty Board to deal with those civilians and military personnel who ran afoul of civilian or military law during the Vietnam War. This was one of my most difficult government assignments. The Board was philosophically divided on amnesty with me at one end of the spectrum and a Marine General at the other. We had court-martial transcripts of literally more than a million pages to review. The Board had only a year in which to work. The work load was so heavy that the Board was doubled by President Ford and at my suggestion, another priest, Monsignor Frank Lally, was added. The staff, at the end of our year of service, ran a computer check on the decisions we rendered as Judges in individual cases. I was happy that the two priests led the eighteen-member Board as the most forgiving.

With Ford Foundation support, the University of Notre Dame's Center for Civil Rights published four studies on the work of the Amnesty Board. The first, which outlined a whole program of Presidential amnesty, was accepted by the newly-elected President Carter. He enacted civilian amnesty the day after his inauguration and military amnesty a short time later.

President Carter also appointed me U. S. Ambassador in October 1977 to head an eighty-person Congressional and civilian delegation to the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development, to take place in Vienna during September of 1979.

We had a largely State Department staff with another Ambassador, Jean Wilkowski, as Staff Director. Two years of intense preparation, with many studies and reports, were required. Jean and I individually circled the globe several times to attend preparatory conferences and help many developing countries prepare for the Conference.

Jean and I led a small delegation to China where we met most of the ministers of the Beijing Government as the guest of Feng-Yi, their highest Minister for Science and Technology. We also met many university leaders and Science Ministers in the provinces. At first, the Chinese officials called me the Chinese equivalent of Ambassador Hesburgh. When I visited the only Catholic Church and priest~~s~~ then operating in China, and when they learned that I was offering Mass every day in my hotel, wherever we were, they began to call me Hesburgh Shen-fu, Hesburgh the Priest. They still use this greeting when I occasionally meet them in Vienna or Washington or Notre Dame.

I was able to write President Carter's opening statement to the U.N.C.S.T.D. Conference in Vienna, and the new lengthy U. S. Policy Statement. Both of these statements were among the most liberal of U. S. official policy statements regarding our obligation to help the developing countries through financial and technical assistance. The fact that I was primarily a private citizen with no career at stake, and working without government pay (although I was entitled to an Ambassador's salary) enabled me to obtain

support for these two statements. Also, my past government involvement had gained for me many allies and very helpful colleagues, a great network. It was also reasonably important that at the same time, I was Chairman of both the private Overseas Development Council and the Rockefeller Foundation (replacing Cy Vance who was then Secretary of State). Also, I was able to assemble a delegation with some of the best known international scientists as members, so that their support was enormously helpful. Again, it was ultimately a work of intertwining circles reinforcing one another.

When sworn in at the State Department after Senate approval, it was remarked that never before had a priest been a United States Ambassador. In response, I made the point that priests were essentially mediators, and an Ambassador's task was not unlike that, although between humans, not between God and humans. Mediation is a frame of mind, as well as a professional task.

During the last two years of the Carter administration, I was appointed Chairman of the U. S. Select Commission to study Immigration and Refugee Policy. This was a two-year task for sixteen Commissioners, four Cabinet members (Secretary of State, Attorney General, Secretaries of Labor and HEW), eight members of Congress of both parties, all from the Senate and House Judiciary Committees, including the Chairmen, Senator Kennedy and Congressman Rodino, and four public service members.

Again, there were lengthy studies, meetings and consultations, and public hearings from Coast to Coast at ports of entry. We

published a dozen volumes and managed to agree on a new policy that was more humane and effective than the current patch-work of prejudice and inefficiency that allowed millions of illegals to be abused while living in the shadows. Our recommendation for appropriate amnesty for illegal aliens was unanimous. Unfortunately, after three years of follow-up work by a National Committee of fifty distinguished citizens for immigration reform, we still do not have a new law, but it is coming I trust, in 1984. It must come.

During the Reagan administration, I have had only one assignment: to spend a few days in El Salvador as one of the official international observers during the last election of a new Constitutional Assembly. If other tasks were longer, this was certainly the most threatening, as we spent election day in a helicopter, dropping in and getting out of the voting places in the Eastern zone where the guerrilla forces were trying to prevent campesinos from voting or us from seeing them vote in large numbers. Gunfire all day, mostly in our direction, but even then, I was able to bury, in San Miguel, a mutilated soldier who had been killed a few hours before while protecting a voting place. For his mourning mother's sake, I was glad to be there as they carried his body to the cemetery without a priest or even a last blessing. I offered a Requiem Mass for him the next day.

As we were taking off that morning, I told our helicopter crew and fellow observers that at least they would get absolution if we were shot down, but that after seeing all the violence on both sides, if we were caught in a fire fight on the ground, I was not going to use the M-16 provided.

There have been other governmental tasks that I have omitted, such as Chairman of the Board of Visitors at the Naval Academy in Annapolis (where we completely revised the curriculum), a post on the Board of Visitors at the U. S. War College in Washington (where I unsuccessfully tried to have it renamed the Peace Academy).

Now I must ask the readers forgiveness for the personal nature of the observations thus far, but I know of no other way of establishing my credentials to make the following observations in the area of principles and convictions.

First, I decided early in my priesthood that I would never run for any elected office or ever endorse a political candidate or join a political party. My reasons are perhaps somewhat convoluted, but at least sincere. I believe that partisan politics tend to divide people who naturally take sides. I felt that as a priest, it was my task to unite and to mediate, not to divide. Also, while I know many upright and honest political persons, it is difficult to raise money for a campaign without the danger of compromising oneself, and if elected, one does have some obligation to one's supporters, although one may not agree

with them in principle. I made these decisions, I might add, without knowing the precise Canon Law on the subject and have not thought otherwise because of the new Canon Law. These were personal, not legal, convictions. Perhaps having said this, it might strengthen the case somewhat if I add that I have been invited to run for several political offices: for Senator from New York and for the Vice Presidency, to mention two. Also, I have never sought to impose my views on others who may well have had their own good reasons for running for office. Father Bob Drinan's case is particularly relevant here. He provided the best leadership in the House Judiciary Committee for the total revision of the Federal Code. This most important project has not moved forward since he left the House.

On the other hand, I have always been open to appointment to government service under certain conditions.

First, I have only accepted commissions that had some moral dimension to which I felt I had something special to contribute as a priest involved in the apostolate of higher education.

Second, it was important to maintain personal integrity and independence by working as a volunteer without pay.

Third, as a religious under vows, I would not engage in governmental activity that did not have the approval and support of my religious superior, the Provincial. I should add parenthetically that I am grateful beyond measure for a long succession of understanding and supportive religious superiors.

Fourth, I always operated as what I am, a priest, wearing clerical garb, not disguising myself as a layman. I never had to compromise myself as a priest or a religious. I offered Mass and prayed my Breviary each day, and it was no secret, although I never flaunted these integral parts of my life.

Last, I always tried to perform to the best of my ability, did my homework, and asked for no special privileges. I should add that I was almost always the first priest and the only Catholic in these various tasks. The friendships that grew out of these activities were almost always with non-Catholics who are still today among the very best and most caring friends I have ever known. There were very few conversions, but I hope some enduring understanding and certainly growing respect on my side and theirs. All of this was fallout, perhaps little to be expected from government service. In a way, I was trying to practice what Cardinal Suhard of Paris called "The Apostolate of Presence" -- most of the work was meditorial, therefore priestly in a deep sense.

Because of these conditions, there were appointments offered that I could not honestly accept. Perhaps the most significant of these was the Administrator of NASA, just as the Apollo Program to the moon was being launched under President Johnson. It did not seem appropriate that a priest have the ultimate decision on six billion dollars of commercial contracts annually granted for the Apollo Program, with all of the political and commercial infighting that would be involved. I do confess to being

fascinated with the space program and would welcome a chance to see spaceship earth from afar on the space shuttle, provided that I could offer Mass up there each day. Silly? I don't think so. At least it is consistent with past practice and I am sure that the Mass was offered on another explorer craft, the Santa Maria.

One more observation. All of these governmental activities have provided wonderfully rich university archives for future university research and several centers for present research on continuing problems, such as human rights, (nationally and internationally), immigration and refugees problems, and others, particularly international development in the Third World now carried on in our Kellogg Center for International Studies.

In recent years, and with the advent of the new Canon Law, there have been new and serious discussions about the involvement of priests, Brothers, and religious women in public or governmental service.

As one who has little input into whatever decisions that will be made in this area, may I only offer this record of governmental service and ask what may be the relevant questions regarding this record.

1. Has it compromised my priesthood in any way, or has it augmented and enriched my priestly apostolate?
2. Has it compromised the Church, or has it put the Church (or at least one of its representatives) on the cutting edge of some immensely pressing moral problems in our times?

3. Has it involved the Church politically, or has it enabled the Church to give moral leadership (again indirectly through a priestly representative) in seeking a humane, just, and compassionate solution to these difficult moral problems?

4. Would the Church or the priesthood have been better served if the activity outlined in this record had been forbidden or proscribed, or is what was done precisely what one might expect of the Church or priests in times of great moral crises?

After this lengthy and personal account, may I at least give my answer to the above questions: No to the opening part of each of the four questions and a sincere yes to the latter or alternative part of each question. In my judgment, without the government service described, both my priesthood and my Church and my educational apostolate, and the Good News of Christ and the common good of my fellow citizens and the world would have been less well served.

I cannot speak for other countries or other governments, but in the cultural setting of the United States, where so much public good is provided by the volunteer efforts of its citizens, both in and out of government, it would seem that priests and religious can fulfill an important role and should, if they are able and willing, exercise moral and spiritual leadership, as well as fruitful mediation, where they are desperately needed.

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