

# Father Hesburgh Talks About Youth

## *A Note About Today's Page*

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Last week, a distinguished educator, thinker and humanist paid a visit to Alaska. He is Father Theodore M. Hesburgh, the president of Notre Dame University.

Though Father Hesburgh was on vacation, he agreed to sit still long enough for an extensive interview, a slightly edited transcript of which appears below.

**FATHER HESBURGH**, 53, is a man of wide-ranging interests. But, as president of one of America's best-known universities, he is particularly well-versed on the problems and aspirations of youth. It was to this area that he addressed most of his remarks — and they make interesting reading indeed. The thrust of his argument is that the great majority of today's students remain committed to the democratic process and orderly change. But they may not stay that way, he warns, unless working within the system produces results.

Father Hesburgh also examined the draft, an all-volunteer army and the state of race relations in America in the course of the interview.

Ordained a priest in the order of the Congregation of the Holy Cross, Father Hesburgh studied at Notre Dame, Gregorian University, Holy Cross College, and the Catholic University of America. After heading Notre Dame's religion department, he served as the university's executive vice president from 1949-52, when he became president, a post he has held since.

**FATHER HESBURGH HAS** given his time most generously to public service. He is now chairman of the National Commission on Civil Rights, on which he has served since its inception in 1957. He recently served on the Gates Commission, which examined the possibility of an all-volunteer army. In addition, he has served as an officer in a vast number of other educational and public service groups, has received more than 15 honorary degrees and in 1964 was recipient of the President's Medal of Freedom.

His remarks follow.

**Q.** Student unrest is a topic of conversation everywhere these days. Could you give us your views on that — how deep does it go, is it a minority or a majority, and what are the causes?

**A.** If I were answering that a year ago I'd have said it was a great minority, maybe one-tenth of one per cent, going up to one per cent on occasion or two percent on occasion, depending on the individual cause. I think this past year, under the influence of the Cambodian invasion and Kent State and Jackson State, the numbers just leaped tremendously to what might be — at least on an individual campus — 70 or 80 per cent of the students . . .

I think I'd have to center them (student concerns) on several topics that aren't mutually exclusive, like the quality of American life; the large question of war and peace and the place of America in that on the world scene; the question of priorities of the nation — of military priorities versus human priorities; the educational system, medical care and other things.

**I THINK THE** generality of young people, for better or for worse, have a feeling that we've got our priorities all wrong, that our values are not in order, that somehow we're spending a lot of money on things that are peripheral and not very much — or we spend it with great agony — on things that are terribly important, that much of the brains in what they call the Es-

tablishment, whether it be the industrial establishment or the military establishment — and they're quick to admit there are brains in those establishments — most of the brains are directed toward things of a secondary order rather than a primary order.

And it just takes something to bring all this to a head, like Kent State and Jackson State and Cambodia brought it to a head in May. There could be other things of a completely different order that would bring it to a head later on.

But the problem you fundamentally have is that the university doesn't live in a vacuum — it's part of the total world — and that we are somewhat at the mercy of what's happening about us. If you were to ask me point blank where we going to have a quiet fall or a turbulent fall I'd say there's nothing we can do to control that.

**IT WILL BE** controlled by what happens in the world in the fall: whether there's been some evidence of progress and action on these very important problems, whether we're moving toward disengagement in Indochina, whether we have a more serious effort on the part of the Congress to do something about civil rights and about the whole question of poverty, the quality of life, environment and all the rest.

I think the environment very often, at least around the central states, is a kind of a phony issue. It's a very real issue in fact, but it's a bit of a phony issue as far as blacks are concerned, or Mexican-Americans. They feel why worry about the beauty of the park when you don't have enough to eat or your house is substandard or your kids aren't being educated. They think these are more important; I think they're more important. But on the other hand, environment does tie into the other questions I've mentioned as part of the total quality of life and quality of priority.

**Q.** Do you think most students are still willing to try to improve things within the framework of the system?

**A.** The great majority are trying to work within the system. But again the extent to which they continue this conviction that they can work within the system is going to depend on the kind of success they have.

I think giving the 18 year olds the

vote is a good move. I'm not concerned about the fact that many of them are going to work in political campaigns in the fall because I'd rather see them politically conscious than politically apathetic as they always have been in the past. The worst voting group in the country has been those between 21 and 25 and that's a bad thing.

**I DON'T THINK** it's going to happen now, though, with the 18 year olds. I would say generally speaking that there are many good things about their concerns; they are very real concerns; and that it's better that they have the concerns than don't have them and that the vast majority of them believe in non-violent approaches within the system to do something about them.

But they've got to have some success, some evidence that they're not just spinning their wheels, or licking stamps or pressing doorbells. Something has to start happening.

**Q.** If something doesn't start happening, you'd look for further . . .

**A.** Some trigger could set something else off. It would be really this time out of frustration. I think the whole Cambodian thing was a matter of frustration — there was evidence of disengagement on all fronts and then suddenly there was re-engagement on a broader front, and that led to this enormous frustration.

**Q.** What about the radicals? There is a certain radical element on the campuses and there has been a great deal of dispute about how these people should be coped with and what they're trying to accomplish.

**A.** I think they are a very, very small minority. I would put them in most universities I'm acquainted with at, oh, less than a tenth of one per cent. It might go to a fifth of one per cent some places and in some very urbanized places, like Columbia and Berkeley, it might go to one per cent. But it's a very, very small minority who are what I would call the destroyers or the ultimate radicals — the type of SDS-Weatherman thing — who have given up on the system, who believe in violence as a solution, who unfortunately have had their violence rewarded in certain spots.

**Q.** Could you give some examples of where you think it has been rewarded.

**A.** Well, the very fact that so many of my colleagues have had to quit their jobs I think can be traced in the last analysis back to the fact that their jobs became jobs of coping with violence rather than acting rationally within an educational system.

**Q.** So in some instances radicals have been able to force people out of their jobs . . .

**A.** And they've also been very successful in being covered closely by all of the media. I mean there's an enormous propensity on the part of all the media, particularly the pictorial media, to show radical action rather than non-radical action because it's pictorially sensational and it's dramatic.

You know if kids are out trying to get a good guy elected it's much less dramatic than burning down a building; you get better pictures of kids burning down a building and cops throwing tear gas, policemen firing fire hoses and all the rest of it. It's just a more dramatic picture.

You get a picture of policemen shooting a student and it's worth thousands of dollars in Life magazine; you get a picture of a student helping a policeman, say do something in a slum, and it's not worth five cents. But that's part of the priorities that they're sensitive to.

**Q.** How about the draft? You've been pretty closely involved with the draft and the professional army alternative. How do the students feel about it, and do you believe the professional army might be a solution or not?

**A.** First of all, I'm in favor of professionalism in everything — in the law, the clergy, the medical profession. Professionalism isn't something I'm afraid of — I think it's something we need. And if 199 million Americans can't civilianly control a million professionals, then something's wrong with the society rather than the army.

As far as the draft goes I think it's one of the big hangups with students. It makes them completely reorder their lives. Many are in higher education who shouldn't be there because they're only avoiding something; many are doing things, like teaching grammar school or high school, that they don't really want to do, but they're doing it to avoid the draft; there are many people who probably get married to avoid the draft, who don't particularly want to at this precise point. There's just a complete dislocation, and there has been over the last five years, in the lives of many youngsters because there has been a draft.

I spent the last year on a commission called the Gates Commission, or the President's Commission for an All-Volunteer Army, and we put out a fairly substantial volume that took up all the objections to an all-volunteer army — the economic objections, the objections that it might be a black army, that it might be an all-professional army, that it might be an undemocratic army, that it might be an army out of touch with society, etc., etc., etc.

**I THINK** we've proved, at least to my satisfaction, that all of these are kind of modern myths that don't necessarily hold water and that in view of the kind of society we have and the fact that we have to have an army of some sort, of some number, some proportion, that it would probably be better to get it by voluntary method than by the conscription method, because conscription is fundamentally unfair. It only strikes maybe 1 out of 10; secondly, it's economically unfair because you don't pay them what they have coming (we hope you would induce more people to get into an army where they were paid decently and we're moving in that direction); and thirdly, it's a kind of unnecessary restriction on a person's freedom.

Now people say it's unpatriotic not to go into the army. Well, I just don't buy that as a single means of patriotism; the only patriotic people in the world aren't just those in uniform. If that were true most women would be eliminated from patriotism.

I think you're patriotic when you do something for your country and I think there are thousands of ways of doing something for your country, in education, in medicine, in art, in music, in building, in journalism . . . there are just lots of ways to add to the quality of life in your country and if you do it you're being patriotic. A good mother and father raising a good family are being patriotic as far as the country is concerned, because they're a fundamental building block of the country.

**SO I THINK** we've got to get away from this attitude that the only patriotic people are people running around with a rifle or somehow involved in a military activity. That is a patriotic activity, but it's far from being the only one.

I think we have to give young people many options and give them to them in freedom. I think this would take all the sting out of it. I would guess you could get people who want to be of service to volunteer if you reward them amply. It would be an opportunity for many people from socio-economic classes who otherwise aren't going to get educated, aren't going into a trade or aren't going to be able to move upward with some social mobility, and for them being in the service for a few years might be a means of doing something they otherwise couldn't do if they come from a depressed part of the country.

On the other hand I would think that we ought to make it attractive and patriotic, admittedly patriotic, to give youngsters all kinds of other options

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to do things of great importance for the country, like teaching in depressed areas, social and medical work in areas that are deprived of them, and a whole range of other things.

**Q.** If for one reason or another a fully professional army did not materialize do you think some form of national service as an alternative to military service might be advisable?

**A.** Yes, I've stood for this for a long time . . . Insofar as we have the draft it would be good to have an alternative to the draft and this is a good alternative.

**Q.** How about the racial situation? . . . I think there is a feeling up here that the racial situation in this country in many respects is growing worse instead of better.

**A.** I think you people up in this part of the country have an enormous opportunity to create a multiracial society. I think the great drive in our part of the country, which is very bad, is to create really two societies, one black and one white or one brown and one white in some areas, taking in the Spanish-speaking Mexican-Americans; one educated, one uneducated; one poor, one affluent; one with hope and one hopeless — that's the real tendency. This is the thrust of the Kerner Report.

And it's largely due I think to white racism, institutional racism, things that almost automatically and unthinkingly eliminate people from some opportunities. I spent 12 years on the United States Commission on Civil Rights (I'm the only original member left and chairman at the moment) and I've seen enormous progress in this area but I've also seen the enormous progress yet ahead of us.

**I THINK** we've licked the voting thing. Anybody can vote in the U.S. now, whereas when we started this commission in 1957 there were literally millions of people who couldn't register to vote. Throughout the Black Belt counties of the South the majority of the population was black, but the fact was that throughout many of these counties not a single black person was registered or could get registered without being hung or shot at, deprived of his job or whatever. I think that one's licked.

We've pretty well licked public accommodations, except some vestiges of private clubs. The general public accommodations things has pretty well been licked, and overnight, by law, which is an interesting thing. People say law doesn't solve anything; it solved that problem overnight, really. Even Governor Maddox (of Georgia) can't keep people from eating chicken in his shop.

The three key problems that remain really are interlocking problems. There's the problem of education which is central (I have to admit to some prejudice in this since I've been in education all my life). Housing is another, and employment is another.

**BUT THESE** are so interlocking that if we have large areas in Chicago, New York, Detroit, and Washington that are 70, 80, 90 or 100 per cent black as far as the housing pattern goes, for mile after mile after mile of neighborhoods, then it's obvious that we're not going to have any integration there because there are no white kids to integrate the black schools. They're going to be 100 per cent black and it doesn't excuse it to say it's not de jure but defacto, it's not by law but by practice, because the fact is that very often its supplemented by federal housing money and by all sorts of federal practice.

If you live in a depressed neighborhood, you go to a depressed school. And the fact is that in most of our black schools the youngster, if he goes for 12 years, gets about 9 years of education; he can't get into a decent college. If he can he has a very hard time making it. If he goes to a black college, by the time he graduates he has about the equivalent of a high school education and that's terrible because you're kidding people into thinking they're getting an education when they're not. This is being picked up. The black colleges are making an enormous effort. But still half the students in higher education are in black colleges so this is a problem that requires enormous attention.

The third thing of course is that if you haven't been well-educated you aren't qualified for a job and the simple fact is that is that the median income for Negroes in the United States is half what it is for whites and the amount of unemployment is twice what it is for whites. Among young people, especially those that are dropouts from high school, the black unemployment would be four or five times what it is for whites. They simply aren't qualified for anything.

**WELL, THEN** you stop to think that 400,000 blacks a year are coming onto the market from high school, many of whom are undereducated and unequipped to compete in a 90 per cent white society. With prejudice, there's another barrier. You can begin to see the frustration that builds up with these kinds of numbers when in fact in 10 years you're talking about 10 million young people between the ages of 18 and 28, say, and this is a substantial proportion of the country's young people. And it just happens there are more black young people around than white in proportion because their families are larger.

So we are sowing the seeds of a very bad whirlwind, I think, and we have to take some rather dramatic steps to get at the housing patterns, the education patterns, and the employment patterns or we're going to have some real trouble. We're going to have a divided society, which is the very opposite of what all our doctrines stood for . . .

It's like Dickens' Tale of Two Cities — it's the best of times and the worst of times. We've done more in the last 10 years than we've done in the whole history of the country and yet again we have so much further to go because hopes have been raised, frustration is rampant. Whereas here your numbers are so small I think you somehow have an opportunity to learn from our experience, and avoid some of these kind of problems that we have painted ourselves into a corner with.

**Q.** If you were giving Alaska advice, what sorts of programs would you recommend?

**A.** I would really bend over backward to make sure that everybody had equal opportunity in education. I think that's terribly important at all levels — elementary and secondary, and higher education.

I would certainly work very hard for integrated education because I think where some of our people south here say you can't integrate in the schools because you can't expect younger people to do what older people haven't done in this society. The simple fact is that young people are always better at integrating than older people and the younger you are the less amenable you are to prejudice because nobody is born with prejudice, you have to acquire it. And if you start out life not yet having acquired it and getting along with people in a multiracial society, then you learn how to respect people of other colors or other national backgrounds . . . and that is half the problem of people accepting this kind of life in a multi-racial society.

**SO I THINK** the strongest thing is, don't get into the kind of patterns we have where we have completely separated neighborhoods, completely separated education for a great, great proportion of the population, and completely separated educational opportunity due to housing patterns. The time to avoid that is really now and if we could have avoided Harlem becoming a black slum if you will, or South Chicago becoming a black slum, or Watts becoming a black slum we would have avoided a great many of our problems.

But instead, we institutionalized the problems by solidifying the housing program, thereby solidifying the educational program and thereby further solidifying the inequality of job opportunity.

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