



# GUESS WHO'S FOR THE ERA?

## FATHER THEODORE HESBURGH

**I** am very much for the Equal Rights Amendment and would like to see it passed in the Bicentennial year as part of the fulfillment of the promise of this nation. Its passage is, in fact, long overdue.

I'm familiar with the objections to its passage because they are the very same ones that were made against the passage of the 19th Amendment, giving women the right to vote.

I have always been aware of the discrimination women face. After I got my doctorate from Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., I came back to Notre Dame and became president in 1952. I was appointed a member of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and became its chairman from 1969 to 1972.

I had to study all about suffrage while on the commission because we were looking for solutions to black voting rights. I studied everything I could about voting rights and when I looked into the early part of this century, I first ran into those statements, so familiar today, that say if women vote, if they get their equal rights, the home will be destroyed and women will be unprotected; they'll get mixed up in politics. And I say, why not?

I think that when the ERA is passed, it will be largely symbolic in the beginning. We didn't solve the problems of black voters by passing constitutional amendments, but when this country got serious about it, we went back to the 14th Amendment to the Constitution and had something to point to.

When people hear I'm for the ERA, they think right away I'm for abortion. A lot of people read

this into it. I separate the two, as they should be, and I have no difficulty supporting the ERA. People bring to this amendment all kinds of personal objections. But everything comes down to the fact that women should have the exact same rights as men.

People tell you that you can't change things by law, that the heart must be moved first. But we, the Civil Rights Commission, took 200 years of public accommodations that segregated blacks in buses, movies, restaurants, and hotels and changed that in one day with the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Now I admit there were teeth in the public accommodations act. A company would be out of business if it didn't comply. We have no bite in the ERA, but we need the bark first.

Opponents cite the draft—that women will be drafted. I worked to get the law passed for an all-volunteer army. Now we have one; we don't have a draft. I was on the federal clemency board, and one of my colleagues said that if the clemency board were successful we'd never get people to fight again. I said that might be a good idea. I feel that way about the draft. And the draft has nothing to do with the ERA. It's separate.

Opponents say women will become like men. I think women will have to work overtime to catch up with men at evildoing.

*Father Theodore Hesburgh has been president of Notre Dame University for 23 years. His comments were shared with Carol Kleiman, feature reporter for the Chicago "Tribune."*