

(Address given by the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President, University of Notre Dame, at the Commencement Exercises, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, June 6, 1968)

IN DEFENSE OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION

On the way across town to the University of Southern California this morning, I stopped at the Good Samaritan Hospital, where Senator Kennedy died a few hours ago, to sympathize for a moment with his brother, Senator Ted Kennedy, and the widows of John and Bob. I told them that I would dedicate my remarks this morning to the memory of these two brothers, with the prayerful hope that their example might be much more persuasive than my words. The talk I have written is in defense of youth -- something I know they would understand as they exemplified what I am trying to say: that the world needs the idealism, the generosity, the service, the concern, the great dedication of the young. These two brothers might have used their wealth for fun and games, luxury and ease. Instead, they gave their lives unstintingly to public service, in the interest of the poor, here and about the world. They gave what none of us will be called upon to give: their very lives and their youthful hopes. In doing so, they left both the young and the old of this world a legacy, and a new hope too, that out of their sacrifice will emerge a better America and, indeed, a better world.

I would like to begin today with a quotation from a famous author: "What is happening to our young people? They disrespect their elders, they disobey their parents. They ignore the laws. They riot in the streets inflamed with wild notions. Their morals are decaying. What is to become of them?" These words were written more than 2,300 years ago, by Plato, the Greek philosopher.

[6-6-1968]

Our honored guest and speaker this evening is a most remarkable man. Through his stamina, his dedication, his wisdom, Father Theodore M. Hesburgh during the past twenty-five years has contributed to the welfare of his fellow-men, near and far. He is, first and foremost, a priest, indeed one of America's most respected clergymen. But he is also an educator and for the past eighteen years the president of a great, independent university. He has been a diplomat, exploring the peaceful uses of atomic energy with representatives of countries on both sides of the "iron curtain." Back in this country he has been a tireless public servant, discharging with distinction major responsibilities given to him by four Presidents of the United States.

When Congress created the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights in 1957, Father Hesburgh was appointed by President Eisenhower as one of its charter members. In the intervening thirteen years four Presidents have occupied the White House, and Commission members have come and gone, but Father Hesburgh alone of the original group remains, serving today as the Commission's outspoken chairman. No one sees more clearly the magnitude of the civil rights problem in the United States, and no one has addressed himself more courageously to it. His tireless service in this and other government posts was recognized in 1964 when he received from President Johnson the nation's highest civilian honor, The Medal of Freedom.

Paralleling his service to his country has been his long service to the Church, not just as a priest but notably as the Vatican's Permanent Representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency. The emissary of three Popes, Father Hesburgh has personified the Church's concern that atomic energy might be used peacefully for the welfare of people everywhere, helping them conquer hunger and sickness and giving them a better life.

It is typical of Father Hesburgh's openness that one of his closest friends at the annual meeting of the Atoms-For-Peace organization in Vienna was the Soviet Union's chief delegate, Emelyanov. Here in friendship were linked the Kremlin and the Vatican. Not the least of Father Hesburgh's diplomatic achievements was persuading the Soviet scientist to turn out his entire Communist delegation for a diplomatic Mass in honor of Christ the King at the great Cathedral of Saint Stephen in Vienna.

Father Hesburgh has also been an educational statesman. In addition to heading the University of Notre Dame, he has served as president of the International Federation of Catholic Universities and the Association of American Colleges. He is a member of the Carnegie Commission on the Future of Higher Education and served on the Select Committee created by Governor Rockefeller to study the future of private higher education in the State of New York. He has also been active in the affairs of the American Council on Education, the Institute of International Education and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Heavy as all these responsibilities are and have been, they are ancillary to his principal post since 1952 as president of Notre Dame. When he took over, Notre Dame was known primarily as a good, Catholic, undergraduate institution with a football team that usually won. The "Fighting Irish" still win most of the time, but during Father Hesburgh's eighteen year tenure and through his leadership and insistence on excellence, Notre Dame has become an internationally celebrated institution of graduate as well as undergraduate studies, clearly in the mainstream of American higher education. Since Father Hesburgh became president, the University has erected two dozen major buildings, the enrollment has grown from 5,000 to 8,000 students, the endowment has surged from \$8.5 million to \$63.5 million, and the annual operating budget has increased from \$10 million to more than \$45 million. During the past ten years alone the University has generated \$100 million

in gifts, grants and commitments. In the last year or two of turmoil on college campuses everywhere, Father Hesburgh has emerged as one of the nation's strongest and most forthright university presidents, defending the right of students to protest, but insisting at the same time that the University's operations must not be impeded nor the rights of others compromised.

Up to this point I have been speaking of the Father Hesburgh whose activities are followed closely by the New York Times and the news magazines. But there is also the man who moves quietly about his priestly work. Wherever he goes, and he has visited virtually every country in the world, he carries a little black bag with the vestments and other things he needs to say his daily Mass, whether it be in a great cathedral, aboard ship, or in his hotel room. He is the priest who so many times has been called to his office door in the wee hours of the morning to counsel a troubled student. He is the priest who after conferring one hour at the White House rushed to a couple in another part of Washington whose marriage was in danger of going on the rocks.

Gentlemen, it is my honor and pleasure to present to you this evening a splendid American, a warm and compassionate priest, a distinguished educator, the president of the University of Notre Dame....Father Theodore M. Hesburgh!

Speaking to the Spartans of the University of Southern

California, our old rivals, it seemed appropriate to begin by quoting a couple of Greeks. They were and are doubly relevant.

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I was really trying to understand and defend young people in this essay. One of the sad elements of the student revolution was that the young were indiscriminately dismissed as kooks or worse. I lived with them. Most of them were deeply sincere and troubled. Nothing was to be gained in writing them off. Anyway, I tried to interpret them to a fairly conservative audience in Southern California.

One last interesting aside. John Wayne, the Duke, also received a degree that day. While we were having lunch together afterwards, I asked him if he had made a new movie lately. "Yeah," he said. "You won't like it." "What's it about," I asked. He growled a bit, grinned, and said sheepishly, "The Green Berets." But you cannot dislike John Wayne. <sup>Of course</sup> At least, I cannot. At least, he was listening.

[6-6-1968] USC talk  
Los Angeles

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Another equally famous Greek philosopher, Aristotle, took an almost equally dim view of the young: "Young people have exalted notions, because they have not yet been humbled by life or learned its necessary limitations; moreover, their hopeful disposition makes them think themselves equal to great things. They would always rather do noble deeds than useful ones: their lives are regulated more by moral feelings than by reasoning -- all their mistakes are in the direction of doing things excessively and vehemently. They overdo everything -- they love too much, hate too much, and the same with everything else."

I begin thus today just to assure the older generation that the generational gap looks much the same at a distance of twenty-four centuries, and likewise to remind this younger generation that they did not invent youth and all that makes it both attractive and difficult. I would like to say of the younger generation what Frenchmen are purported to say of women: vive le difference -- long live the difference between generations. We need it. They do, too.

This is not to say that the difference between generations is always exactly the same -- even though Plato and Aristotle may strike a few responsive chords. For one thing, there are not only many more people around today -- about half of them are young people. Twenty years ago, there were thirty million Americans under twenty years of age. Today there are over eighty million Americans under twenty, and, in a few years, half of the population will be aged under twenty-five. This makes the younger generation more visible, more omnipresent, and, let's face it, a very substantial part personally of what America is. There is no reason

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**THOUGHTS  
FOR OUR TIME**

**V**

*On University Education  
and Human Rights*

**BY**  
**REV.**  
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