

Hesburgh outspoken on election

By Roy Larson

Sun-Times Religion Writer

SOUTH BEND — The Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, in an interview last week, would not say which presidential candidate he will vote for Nov. 2, but he did express his candid views on several subjects being debated in the campaign — the Southern Baptist religion of Jimmy Carter, abortion, amnesty, morality in foreign policy, taxation of church-owned property and President Ford's pardon of Richard M. Nixon.

The 59-year old president of the University of Notre Dame was chairman of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights until he was fired by Nixon in 1972. He is a trustee of the Rockefeller Foundation and a member of the board of the Chase Manhattan Bank. In 1974, Ford named him to the nine-member board that administered the post-Vietnam clemency program.

The questions and answers went like this:

Q. How significant a role do you think religion is playing in the 1976 campaign?

A. Its role has been exaggerated. I had hoped we passed over the concern about a candidate's religion when we got through the (John F.) Kennedy election. The press ought to be blamed somewhat for this. You know a guy has a tendency to answer questions put to him, so you ask him if he prays and he says he prays. You ask him if he prays often and he says he prays often. Then you say he's talking about religion all the time.

Q. Is there anything about Carter's religion that concerns you as a Roman Catholic?

No, not a blessed thing. I think Catholic religion tends to be more cerebral than Southern Baptist religion, but that doesn't bother me. It's rather refreshing to have someone who can speak about prayer, God, faith and compassion in a normal way. Mr. Carter's religion will not be a factor in determining how I vote.

Q. As one who has been critical of the tactics of some anti-abortion "zealots," do you have any reservations about the way the nation's Catholic bishops have handled the abortion issue this fall?

A. I think the bishops have to be concerned about moral issues. I wish more people were. After their meetings with the two candidates, the bishops issued a statement expressing their views on 40 subjects. They made it clear we are not a one-issue church. . . . When the abortion issue becomes the single test for judging a candidate, then it's an unfair test.

Q. As a result of the part the Catholic Church has played in the campaign, do you think there has been any damage to ecumenical and interfaith relations?

A. I think these relationships probably have been bruised a bit, but I don't think they have been ultimately damaged. One of the great virtues in American life is tolerance.

Q. Do you favor a constitutional amendment on abortion?
A. Eventually, I think we can find a form of amendment that could be passed. It is likely to be a compromise as most amendments are in a pluralistic society. I am sure we can improve on the situation we now have which is practically abortion on demand for whatever frivolous reason during the first trimester.

Q. On amnesty, do you support the position of one candidate more than the other?

A. I think either candidate would have to qualify his present position if he is elected. The clemency board did some good things, but it was too small in its impact. It touched only 15 to 20 per cent of the cases it should have touched.

Q. Was President Ford right when he pardoned Nixon?

A. It was terribly important at the time that we got Watergate out of the way and off the front pages. That would not have happened if we had a long trial of Mr. Nixon. I would have taken a little more time to do it, but I wasn't the President.

Q. Do you think the United States should use its leverage to influence the policies of regimes we consider repressive?

A. We should use every bit of leverage we've got. We should say to those governments: "If there's one thing that's going to color our relationship with you, it's our concern for liberty and justice. We know we can't run your country and we're not going to interfere, but we are not going to go out of our way to provide you with arms and to train your generals." We should not bolster regimes that torture people and treat them like slaves.

Q. What do you think about Carter's statement saying he favors the taxation of church property not used strictly for religious purposes?

A. Let me tell you what we have done at Notre Dame. We have a television and radio station. We established a separate organization and submitted to taxing, because we felt the stations were not an integral part of our function here, which is to run a university. We thought this was the clean way to do it.

Q. Are there many important issues being neglected in the campaign?

A. Nearly every issue, domestic and international, that I think is important is being neglected — race relations, unem-



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ployment, housing, education, our cities, world hunger. The candidates debated domestic issues, but they gave us a lot of Wall Street Journal statistics. The problem of America is a human problem — terrible cities, frightened people afraid to walk the streets at night, youngsters whose whole life is blighted because they are going to schools that are an abomination.

If I were a reporter asking the candidates questions, the two chief questions I would ask are: What's your vision for America? And, since you cannot fulfill this vision yourself, what kind of people would you bring in to help you?