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*file -
Hesburgh*

GUEST:

THE REVEREND THEODORE M. HESBURGH, President
University of Notre Dame

MODERATOR AND EXECUTIVE PRODUCER:

Bill Monroe - NBC News

PANEL:

Bill Monroe - NBC News

Edward B. Fiske - New York Times

John Deedy - Commonweal

Carole Simpson - NBC News

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MEET THE PRESS

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MR. MONROE: Our guest for Christmas Day on MEET THE PRESS is The Reverend Theodore M. Hesburgh, a sort of renaissance man. He has been President of the University of Notre Dame for twenty-five years. He is the former chairman of the U. S. Civil Rights Commission from which post he was fired by President Nixon. He is currently Chairman of the Rockefeller Foundation and was recently appointed U. S. Ambassador to the UN Conference on Science and Technology for Development. He has written eight books and has been awarded honorary degrees by more than fifty universities.

Father Hesburgh, some people are dismayed by the way we observe Christmas these days, by the commercialization of it and the social aspects. Do you look on this modern Christmas with its commercialization and other trappings with a sense of sadness, a sense of loss, or do you find some things in it that are encouraging?

FATHER HESBURGH: Well, I would have to say I am fundamentally an optimist and even though I don't much cherish commercialization when it goes beyond the spiritual content of a peacelike Christmas, I think Christmas is so good it is hard to spoil and I think even with "Santa and the Red Nosed Reindeer" and all the rest there is a deep residue of giving and of love and of joy and of peace that you can't really take away from Christmas.

MR. MONROE: A somewhat related question. You are known as a college president who talks to students. You ended the requirement that students at Notre Dame must attend Mass and we are told that while most of the students at Notre Dame, by far a majority of them are Catholics, something like half of them are estimated to be non-practicing Catholics. Are American young people these days becoming irreligious?

FATHER HESBURGH: Well, Mr. Monroe, I would have to challenge that last thing about non-practicing Catholics because, to put it in a contemporary scene I have been to about half our residence halls to offer Mass at their request during the past semester and almost always it has been wall to wall students. In fact I have a hard time getting from the door into the sacristy to get the vestments on because there are so many students. They have taken the pews out and most of them sit on the floor, there. So if half of them aren't praying the rest of them must be doing double time because I am amazed at the attendance and it is perfectly voluntary.

To answer your question directly, I do not think that youngsters today are getting away from religion. I think I find them more religious than I have seen in the last fifteen or twenty years, on a completely voluntary basis which is quite different.

MR. MONROE: What do you see in them that indicates religiousity - a special interest in religion?

FATHER HESBURGH: Several things. One, if you have a good liturgy they like it very much and they flock to it. Secondly that they have concern for what I would call spiritual values.

The easiest way to get a conversation started at Notre Dame is to start talking about the quality of life or the purposefulness of life or the meaning of life or anything that has to do with a spiritual dimension.

Thirdly, I think in their lives they look for some kind of service. I would guess better than half the students I know are doing things for other people. Whether it is tutoring or visiting old people or helping the retarded child or all the rest.

MR. MONROE: So I take that all to be a sense of a religious sense.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

MR. FISKE: Father Hesburgh, you spent the better part of a decade trying to convince the Vatican that a university such as your own has obligations not only to the Church but to the world of secular scholarship. You won that battle two years ago in the form of a new statement from Rome about the policies on Catholic universities. Now the question would seem to be: in what ways are you Catholic? How do you approach this question?

FATHER HESBURGH: It is a very good question, Mr. Fiske and it is on my mind a good deal. I think we are Catholic

fundamentally in the sense that we do have philosophical and theological concern that runs throughout the whole dimension of the University, if you will. Secondly we stand very seriously for the kind of values today that are not exclusively Catholic, but Catholics should be concerned about them, values like world justice, values like peace, values like non-violence, kinds of values that put a religious dimension into life.

Thirdly I would say that we try very hard to be of service to the Church in many ways. For example, to have a more meaningful liturgy, for example, to some how do something about church music, which fell to a rather lower state immediately after the Council and a wide variety of pastoral things to which we are able to bring an intellectual and theological dimension.

MR. FISKE: You have often made the point that the student activism of the '60s reflected at least in part the kind of concern for values that you are talking about. At the moment though the campuses of the country would seem to be almost hauntingly tranquil. Does this disturb you?

FATHER HESBURGH: Well, Mr. Fiske, my problem is, I always wish we could have something of the excitement of the '60s, with a little of the educational concern of the '70s put together. We always seem in America to be either at a high or at a low and mostly in transit from one point to the other and we go up and down like a rollercoaster in

our moods. Today I find there is a residual basic concern for values in the world but you have to work at it. Students will listen, they will get turned on if you turn them on but it isn't an automatic thing the way it was in the '60s when people had that immediate concern about the war, about civil rights and about poverty.

MR. FISKE: Do you think as some of your colleagues do that students have become almost too preoccupied with grades, with getting into graduate school, with trying to beat the competition for jobs?

FATHER HESBURGH: There certainly are a number of them that do that. I try to down-play it when I am speaking with them because it seems none of us remember our grades -- at least I don't -- and they are not all that important. On the other hand if you have to apply for graduate school next year you know it is going to be important at that point, which maybe says something about our admission processes. They are probably too quantitative and not qualitative enough.

MR. DEEDY; Father Hesburgh, during the presidential campaign you were mentioned as a possibility for the Vice Presidential spot on the Democrat ticket. Would you think this a proper role for a priest? Not necessarily for yourself but for any priest?

FATHER HESBURGH: No, I wouldn't. I suppose one could argue about it and I think everyone has to live his own life but I decided a long time ago that I would never run

for elective office because I felt I would then become somewhat divisive. No matter what you do in that direct political participation you turn some people on and you turn some people off and as a priest I would rather bring people together than to separate them. I have never worried about appointive office because that generally means you are serving in some capacity where you may have a special competence. I have always been open to service and I think there has never been a time when I haven't had two or three government jobs simultaneously but for elective office, for myself at least, I would say no.

MR. DEEDY: Even in this generalized role in the general society, Father, there seems to be a growing concern among certain lay groups -- a group in Chicago just recently issued a statement to the effect that the activist priest is preempting the role of the layman and that by his individualism he is bypassing the laity and as a matter of fact the laity is being reduced to kind of a secondary role in terms of the traditional concepts about the role of the layman in the secular society. Do you go along with this sort of worry?

FATHER HESBURGH: Yes I do to a great extent. I did my doctoral thesis years ago on the theology of the layman and I believe deeply in the place of the layman in the Church. For example at our university which had been owned by a clerical society for 125 years, we turned it over to a lay board and if anybody owns the university of Notre

Dame today -- I think it happens to be a public trust but if anybody owns it it is owned by this lay board. At least under the law they hold and direct it as the corporate body that controls the policy. I think that is proper. I would much rather work for a lay board today than I would for a clerical board.

MR. DEEDY: Do you share the concern of the Chicago group, for instance, that the demise of the traditionally lay Catholic organization, the National Association for International Peace, the National Catholic Social Action Conference, that the demise of these, the non-replacement by other organizations has in effect deprived the Church of a generation of lay leadership?

FATHER HESBURGH: Well, I do and I don't. I do in the sense that I think there should be a corporate concern about all of these areas, where it is peace or social action or whatever. On the other hand I have always been a little turned off, if you will, by "Catholic All American" or something like that. I think Catholics ought to compete in our society with everybody else and they ought to join the normal societies that are concerned with all of these great values, and there are innumerable societies today concerned about every good thing you want to think about and I think Catholics ought to get in and work with everyone else in those societies rather than herding off to the side to do something just on their own.

MS. SIMPSON: Father Hesburgh, in 1969 you were with the U. S. Civil Rights Commission and at that time you were quoted as being worried that our society was moving toward two separate ones, one white and one black, and you were concerned and wanted to make sure that this country was working toward a just and equal society, making that dream come true.

It has been eight years since that time. How much progress have we made toward making that dream come true?

FATHER HESBURGH: Ms. Simpson, sometimes I think we are sliding backwards. Again, it is not an either/or, yes/no kind of proposition. There are some areas like equality in employment which I think opened up greatly since then. Certainly in higher education and professional schools have opened up although we have a few problems with the Bakke case. There are other areas that I think we have simply institutionalized to an extent that they will never be deinstitutionalized again.

What really bothers me most today is something we used to count on a great deal which is integration on the elementary/secondary schooling level and I think if anything, that has gone backwards.

I think our inner cities have become more and more the haunt of minorities, if you will. I think the suburbs have become more and more the place that whites flee to. I think the problem in many large metropolitan areas today is you have got no white kids left to integrate and I think

the level of schooling in the inner city today is desparate and at times disasterous and I have a feeling that, now, the teenage unemployment of minority youngsters is not just that the jobs have fled to the suburbs but also that the youngsters aren't getting educated enough to have good jobs.

MS. SIMPSON: You were a vocal critic of past administrations. We have a new one and there seems to be growing disenchantment among black Americans with the Carter administration on teenage black unemployment, welfare reform, urban policy. How would you assess the administration's performance so far?

FATHER HESBURGH: Well, I begin with our intentions and I think their hearts are in the right place. Certainly it is hard to criticize President Carter or Vice President Mondale or Joe Callifano over in HEW for having wrong intentions. They have all the right intentions. I think one problem is that they took on just about everything at once. They took on a whole wide panoply, a whole continuum of problems and you just can't pay that much attention to that many problems at once. I would hope with the turn of the new year they might take a precise problem like the cities or a precise problem like teen age unemployment and really try to move very carefully and very substantively on that problem, although I suspect that the move on teen age unemployment means you have to move on teen age education, which is residually much more important.

MR. MONROE: Father, let me ask you about a couple of rôles which you play which are unorthodox in terms of the way we conceive of most priests operating. And you are a particularly interesting priest because of your intense involvement at upper levels of various activities of our society. For example you are on the board of the Chase Manhattan Bank. What is the role of a priest on the board of the Chase Manhattan Bank?

FATHER HESBURGH: I think to be a kind of conscience. One, banks like every other business organization have lots of moral problems and I am supposed to be involved when a moral problem arises. There aren't that many moral problems but occasionally one arises and I am generally asked what I think about it and I try to be quite frank in what I think about it.

Secondly there are all kinds of things that a bank can do because it has power, the power of the money it holds, invests, it lends, et cerera. And in these areas I think I have to be concerned that there is a humane as well as a good banking procedure. In a sense we are concerned about the employment of minorities, that we are concerned about small business, that we are concerned about very serious international concerns like South Africa. And to that extent, that is what I was asked to do as a member of that board and what I try to do. I suspect I spent the first two years learning what a bank was all about.

MR. MONROE: You are ambassador, relatively newly appointed, to the upcoming UN Conference on Science and Technology for Development, If I have the whole title right. What role do you expect to play in that and what do you expect to come out of that?

FATHER HESBURGH: Well, what I would like to see come out of it, Mr. Monroe, is that we some how address ourselves seriously to getting rid of what I would call grinding poverty in this world. We can do it. We are the first generation that can do it. It has been made possible because of science and technology. Today we can get rid of the problem of hunger, the problem of habitat, the problem of unemployment in a drastic way throughout the world; the whole problem of food and hunger and nutrition. All of these things are now possible including education worldwide through satellite communication. We can get rid of all of these between now and the turn of the century if we have the political will to do it. What I would like to do is to see the United States and to help be part of this process, to come up with a North-South policy or a policy between the affluent and the poor countries of this world that will address itself first of all to those basic human needs from which at least a billion people in the so-called Fourth World suffer, today. They don't have enough to eat, they don't have education, they don't have jobs, they don't have hope for the future. We can eliminate that kind of

grinding poverty I think in the next twenty years if we have both the pattern for doing it and the will to do it.

MR. FISKE: Father Hesburgh, you made reference a moment ago to the Bakke case brought by a white student who charges he was the victim of reverse discrimination in being denied admission to a medical school. What kind of a decision would you like to see on this?

FATHER HESBURGH: Well, what I suspect I will see, although I don't like to second guess or even first guess the Supreme Court, I would think the case itself was not argued all that well where it began and as Justice Holmes said, bad cases make bad laws.

I would like to see first of all our emphasis be on goals rather than quotas because Quota is a bad word. We really ought to drop it from the discussion, I think. It too complicates the problem.

Secondly I would like to see, whatever is done, affirmative action upheld as a very, very important part of our society if we are going to ever balance the scales of justice. It is not a permanent element of our society but until the scales are balanced, until we get the kind of equality that Ms. Simpson and I were talking about a few moments ago, we have got to work harder. The scales are like this today because someone was pressing harder, here. We have to press a little harder, here. Once they are even, then we can move forward.

I suspect the case may be remanded to the original court and retried. I could live with that. I would not want to live with anything that would downgrade affirmative action because affirmative action is absolutely necessary if we are going to get balance in our society.

Thirdly I would like to see them get rid of the word "quota" and go with "goals" which is not/a distinction without a difference, it is a very important difference. The quota you have to do, the goal you do as well as you can as soon as you can.

MR. FISKE: A question about financing higher education. A number of private colleges, realizing that they are reaching the limits of tuition and student jobs and scholarships, are moving towards student loans or parent loans. But this means that a lot of students are coming out of college not only with a diploma but a substantial debt and many people are beginning to wonder whether this is going to affect student career choices, pushing them away from the service professions into more lucrative lines of work. Do you share these fears?

FATHER HESBURGH: I think especially for minority students it would be a very difficult thing to come out with a very large debt. You start with a burden on your back. It is a new kind of servitude, if you will. On the other hand I think a student ought to have some stake in his education. What we try to do at our place is to have

some grant, some work opportunity and some loan. Not to put it all on loan or all on grant. If the student himself or herself has some stake in this process they will appreciate it more in the first instance, they will get their money's worth more and when they get out they will pay it off soon enough.

I think the danger here is not to loan a student so much money that he feels it is such an impossible burden he just ignores it when he gets out of school.

We have very good payback on our loans because we don't loan all that much. We loan about a third of the total package.

MR. DEEDY: Father Hesburgh, in the past you have warned the American Catholic leadership against what you described if I recall correctly selective moral indignation. How do you rate the Catholic leadership at the moment in this regard, particularly in the context for instance of the abortion question and the drive for constitutional amendment on abortion?

FATHER HESBURGH: I see it broadening but it is a long process. I have felt as you indicated for a long time that we have to be concerned about every injustice wherever it is. Every human right wherever it is being abridged. There is no question that the right to life is the most fundamental human right. If you don't have that then you might as well turn off all the others because you

wont have a chance to live. But having said that I have the feeling that in our country what is desperately needed today is a good, strong conversation about this whole question of abortion and I think we have people at both extremes not talking to each other. Somewhere we have to get in here and start talking to each other and to come up with some kind of a solution better than the one we have but probably not as broad as the one we would like.

MS. SIMPSON: Continuing on the abortion matter, now that Congress has agreed under what conditions poor women may get government funded abortions, there are reports that the law is going to be challenged on constitutional grounds. Now it will be charged that religious pressure largely exerted by the Catholic Church influenced how Congress acted. Do you support the tactics, the methods that were used by members of your faith and leaders of your faith in getting Congress to act on the abortion question?

FATHER HESBURGH: Everybody, Ms. Simpson, has a right to work politically for those things in which they believe, especially those moral principles in which they believe. I certainly would have to say that many people disagreed with me, the way I have worked for 15 years for civil rights in this country because I thought desperately we needed them. Many people completely disagreed and said, "You are going to ruin and upset our whole society."

I think Catholics are not alone in this society. They are almost a fourth of society but a fourth is not half and it is not three-quarters, and I think they have to take whatever political means are at hand to try to work for what they consider to be justice. Not justice for themselves but for the society at large. And that gets back to Mr. Deedy's question earlier that I think we can't be selective, we have to work hard for justice wherever we think it is lacking, wherever we think it is needed and I think people are terribly concerned about that basic right to life and I am concerned, myself, about it. I think how you go about it can either turn people off or win victories and I think most people would like to win a victory for justice although I am the first to admit you might overdo your efforts in that regard and may turn people off in the process and may lose the ultimate victory, I don't know. But I try to live my own life in a way that I work hard for justice wherever it is needed.

MR. MONROE: We just have a few seconds, Father, but I wonder if you could comment on students, young people living out of wedlock and whether you argue with them about it.

FATHER HESBURGH: Yes, I would if I had -- you don't always get a chance to argue with them about it but I have a feeling in this situation it is always the woman who loses. At least that is my -- after having watched this process which we didn't invent in this age -- it has been going on for

a long time, maybe not known as widely, but in any event I would argue with them. I think it is not a good situation, not even a good preparation for marriage.

MR. MONROE: Thank you, Father Hesburgh, for being with us today on MEET THE PRESS.

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