

Quotes from Father Theodore Hesburgh, CSC

I never wanted to be anything but a priest, which is in itself a great and unearned grace. I hope to live and die a priest, nothing more, but nothing less, either.

As a priest, my faith and hope and love are in an eternal and not a temporal, terrestrial context. Even so, I am not about to give up on this globe we call earth. I still intend to speak faith, hope, and love as widely as I can during whatever time I am given to live here on earth.

All human beings are our brothers and sisters, all are our neighbors especially when in need. It matters not whether they are black or white, red or yellow, men or women, Eastern or Western, Northern or Southern, young or old, intelligent or dull, good or bad, attractive or repulsive. I believe that since we are all created in the image of God, I cannot love God without loving and serving them as best I can.

God became man and dwelt amongst us. History is now centered in this all important fact. All before Christ prepares for and anticipates his coming. All after Christ is the fulfillment of what he came to do. And all of us have a part in the doing, and in history, even though we are free to do our part well or poorly. Christ is the central focus and meaning of history in the Christian scheme of things.

There is no human event, no human progress in knowledge, science, or art that cannot be consecrated to a higher service, now that God has literally become man and dwelt amongst us. Historians can recognize the unique influence of the man of Galilee. Only faith can see the utter uniqueness of God's great liturgy which is realized in Christ, in whom, and through whom, and with whom all creation is drawn to the service of God as divine symphony in which all of us play a significant part.

I would like to close on a very personal note, which I trust you will indulge me. Over the years, I have stood at the graveside of many of my university colleagues and have contemplated the quiet nobility of their lives, so totally and unselfishly given to the higher education of young men and women. Some day, some of my lifelong associates will stand at my graveside. At that time, I would be greatly honored if they should say, "Well, we worked together for a long time. We didn't always agree,

but that never bothered our friendship or our forward march. At least, he was fair and tried to make the place better. Now he can rest in peace.”

I’m not anxious for that day to come soon, but when it does, I would settle for those final sentiments. Who among us would ask for more? The respect of our colleagues is quite enough, assuming God’s blessing, too. We won’t get one without the other.

Most revolutions have two phases. The first phase of the civil rights revolution in America is, I believe, largely over. It accomplished and wrote into federal law the broad lines of what I would call a national conscience on civil rights, a broad national consensus on what every citizen could and should expect of his country and his fellow countrymen in the areas of voting, education, employment, housing, public accommodations, and the administration of justice. Many may still disagree with the consensus, but the national ideal, the law of the land, is clear and is becoming ever more positive.

The second phase of this civil rights revolution is still largely before us, and is more difficult, because it requires the passage from national to individual conscience in recognizing all these rights, and also involves the assumption by all Americans, whatever their color, of the long-range responsibility of living what we profess: to make full, responsible, and intelligent use of these rights, to do in the privacy of each of our lives what we profess in public as Americans. The second phase is largely educational, while the first phase was largely protest. The first phase gave quick results. The second phase will call on all our religious, educational, and social resources to come to full fruition. And it will call for much more courage, patience, perseverance, and understanding. The second phase must move family by family, neighborhood by neighborhood, city by city, state by state to accomplish on the local scene what has been proclaimed on the national scene. This is where each of you comes in, as responsible, educated, individual human beings. This is why each of you is so terribly important. You may or may not have been among the chosen few who moved the first phase of this revolution. The second phase cannot move without each of you. You must become involved or the second phase will fail.

There's only one way to do it—that is to put yourself in the hands of the Holy Spirit and the Blessed Mother. You will see heartbreaks as well as days of great joy. There will be celebration as well as days of mourning in this Church. But with the Holy Spirit behind you and the Holy Mother inspiring you, these will be great years.

I pray every day to the Holy Spirit, as my friend, to give me the light and strength to do the right thing. And the Holy Spirit has never failed to show me the way, and to give me the strength of purpose to struggle on in the face of all kinds of adversity.

The Holy Spirit is the light and strength of my life, for which I am eternally grateful. My best daily prayer, apart from the Mass and breviary, continues to be simply, 'Come, Holy Spirit.' No better prayer, no better results: much light and much strength.

In prayer and meditation we can find the tranquility and the transforming power of the presence of God. Union with God is, ultimately, the only basis on which our community with others can rest.

It is the work of wisdom to recognize the true human perfections and to order them rightly, so that we do not place the goods of the body above those of the soul, those of time against those of eternity. Wisdom ... gives us an ordered view of the world and of man. This Christian wisdom which begins with God, embraces man, and leads back to God, is the antithesis of the many current forms of wisdom, be they earthly in their total intent, sensual in their feverish pursuit, or satanical in their blind pride. Our prayer today is for the grace to ascend above these counterfeit forms of wisdom that can only lead to disorder, unhappiness, and frustration, because they begin with a false notion of man and then attempt to remake man according to that caricature. May our prayer for wisdom ... be accompanied by prayerful meditation on ... the fact that true wisdom in perfecting the mind of man leads to charity, peace, and order which characterize the perfection of man's will.

Just this week one of our students asked me a very difficult question: "How do you know God, how do you perceive him, contact him, relate to him?"

I told him that God, for me, was Christ incarnate, fully God, fully man, joining in his person God and man, the hopes, the desires, the hungers of man with the transcendence of God. And when Christ left us, he promised us the Holy Spirit to abide with us, to guide us, to give us what we find as the recurring theme of St. John's Gospel: life and light—light to guide us and life to live divinely.

Nothing less is needed to find our way out of the labyrinth of human problems today—with the light of divine guidance.