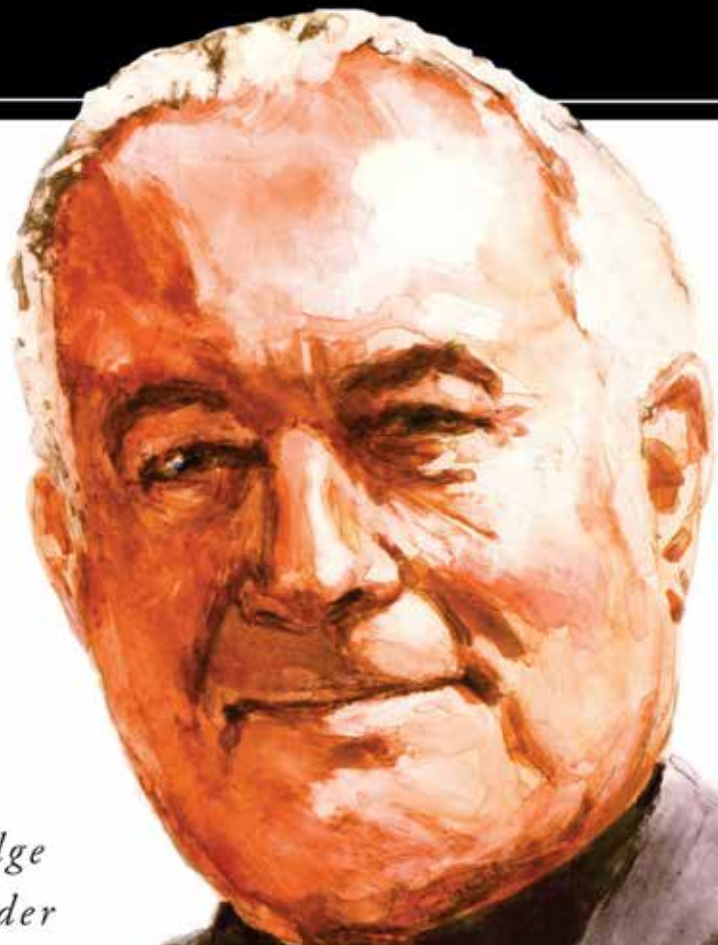


EDWARD P. HAHNENBERG

# THEODORE HESBURGH



*Bridge  
Builder*

DISCUSSION GUIDE

## About the Book

When asked what he wanted written on his tombstone, Fr. Theodore Hesburgh responded with one word: *Priest*. This giant of a man—a man who advised presidents and counseled popes, who championed civil rights and world peace, who accepted 16 presidential appointments and 150 honorary degrees, who served an unprecedented thirty-five years as president of the University of Notre Dame—could have listed any number of accolades. Instead, he chose his first and most important vocation.

Fr. Ted never felt that his calling to be a priest set him apart. Rather, it drew him into relationships with others and out in service to the world. It was a call to serve as mediator, to bridge the divides that separate church and society, conservatives and liberals, the powerful and those on the margins. He spent his life bringing people together.

This new biography is the first to tell the story of the spirituality that shaped one of the twentieth century's most distinguished public servants. It is a story to inspire all those who strive to live out their faith in the midst of a deeply divided world.

## About the Author

Edward P. Hahnenberg holds the Jack and Mary Jane Breen Chair in Catholic Systematic Theology at John Carroll University. He is the author of *Awakening Vocation: A Theology of Christian Call* and *Theology for Ministry: An Introduction for Lay Ministers*, and coeditor of *A Church with Open Doors: Catholic Ecclesiology for the Third Millennium*, all published by Liturgical Press. He is a contributor to *Give Us This Day*. Dr. Hahnenberg is a past consultant to the US Bishops Subcommittee on Lay Ministry and current delegate to the US Lutheran-Catholic Ecumenical Dialogue.

# Discussion Guide

## Chapter One

1. What connection do you have to the strong cultural Catholicism of early twentieth-century America? Did you experience it? Did your parents or grandparents? What do you remember of it, or what have you heard about it from others?
2. What were the strengths of the “thick religious identity” of the Catholicism in which Ted Hesburgh grew up? What were its weaknesses?
3. What made priesthood seem like an adventurous way of life for Ted Hesburgh as a teen?
4. What are your impressions of the Holy Cross formation program as Ted experienced it?
5. Religious men and women received in the 1930s a distinctive idea of obedience. How did it benefit them and their communities? What dangers came with it?

## Chapter Two

1. What was the most interesting thing to you about the theological formation that Hesburgh and his fellow seminarians received? What were the strengths of this education? The weaknesses?
2. Was there any neo-scholastic flavor to your own religious or theological formation? If so, how?
3. What was Hesburgh's vision of priesthood? How does it compare to your own sense of what a priest is and to the role priests have played in your own life?
4. How is the vision of lay life that Hesburgh developed in his early academic work like or unlike the common Catholic understanding of our day? How is it helpful? How not?
5. How did external circumstances in American society begin to impact the life of the University of Notre Dame in major ways in the late 1940s?

## Chapter Three

1. In his first presidential address to the Notre Dame faculty in 1952, Hesburgh spoke about the need for *Christian wisdom*. How did he understand that term? Why is it important in the life of a university? How do think it operates in daily Christian living, in your own experience?
2. How does the Catholic narrative of the meaning of the Enlightenment that was common in the 1950s compare to how it is commonly understood today? Where does the truth lie?
3. What does it mean to suggest that *theology* is “the linchpin to curricular integration” at a Catholic university? How is that conviction necessary and important? How might it become problematic?
4. What are your impressions of Theodore Hesburgh’s daily rhythm of work? Of his working relationships with Fr. Ned Joyce and Helen Hosinki?
5. Why is “an atmosphere of freedom and flexibility and good will” important in a workplace? How is it created, and how is it damaged? How have you seen this in your own experience?
6. Hesburgh said in his *Time* magazine interview, “There is no conflict between science and theology except where there is bad science or bad theology.” What did he mean? Can you think of any examples that illustrate his point?
7. Are you familiar with the *Christ the Word of Life* mural on the outside of the Notre Dame library? Have you seen it in person? What are your impressions of it? How does it “sum up in stone Hesburgh’s vision of a modern Catholic university”?

## Chapter Four

1. Why does Hahnenberg call Hesburgh an “unlikely champion for racial justice”? How are your experiences in this regard similar or dissimilar to Hesburgh’s?
2. What makes the reasons Hesburgh was appointed to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission in the first place so interesting?
3. What made his involvement in the Civil Rights Commission such a decisive point in his career? Was there a particular experience in your life that was especially formative of your own understanding of social justice issues?
4. What did Hesburgh mean when he said civil rights are “first and foremost a theological problem, a moral problem, a spiritual problem”? How do you suppose the issue is each of these things?
5. How do the work and the conclusions of the 1963 statement and the 1970 report of the Civil Rights Commission remain relevant today? Are they outdated in any way?

## Chapter Five

1. Hahnenberg writes of the challenge for a Catholic university to reconcile “the normative faith claims of the Catholic Church with the spirit of open inquiry that defines that academic enterprise.” How is this a challenge? Have you seen this challenge play out in your own educational experiences? How should this reconciliation happen?
2. The Land o’ Lakes Statement calls for Catholic universities to have “a true autonomy and academic freedom in the face of authority of whatever kind, lay or clerical, external to the academic community itself.” What makes these words—as Hahnenberg says—“a revolution”? What do you think of them?
3. Hesburgh described his December 9, 1967, speech as “the most important talk I have ever written.” Why do you suppose it was so important to him, and what does this say about him, his ministry, and his thinking?
4. Consider the three metaphors that Hesburgh used in his speech to describe a Catholic university: a beacon, a bridge, a crossroads. Do any of these seem especially apt to you? Should any have priority? Are there better metaphors than these to express what a Catholic university should be?
5. How old were you at the height of the anti-Vietnam war protests? Do you remember them? If so, what do you remember, and what were your thoughts about them?

## Chapter Six

1. What does Hahnenberg mean when he writes that Hesburgh's work with the Rockefeller Foundation "changed him"? Are there any significant moral issues you've changed your mind about, when you were no longer persuaded even by arguments that you yourself had used in the past? What and why?
2. Do you think William Miscamble's criticism of Hesburgh is fair? Why or why not?
3. Are you old enough to recall the gravity of public concern over the possibility of nuclear war in the early 1980s? What do you remember about it? Why was this issue so important to Hesburgh?
4. Consider the quotation by Hesburgh that closes this chapter. How does it reflect your own experience and choices?
5. What lesson might you draw for yourself from the look this chapter offers at how Hesburgh addressed several important social/moral issues?



## Chapter Seven

1. Are you old enough to remember Pope John Paul II's visit to the United States in 1987? If so, what do you recall about it? Does Hesburgh's challenge to the pope to listen more to the people he addressed ring true to you?
2. If you were to write a letter to the pope today, what would you write about?
3. What does it mean to you that Hesburgh wanted only one word—*Priest*—on his tombstone? If you could choose only one word for your own tombstone, what would it be, and why?
4. What does it mean to you that a baptized person shares in the priesthood of Christ? How do you live this out in your own life?