

This Day in History... May 25, 1917

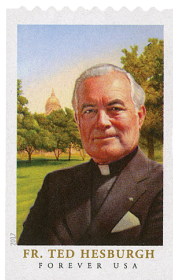
Father Theodore Hesburgh

Reverend Theodore Martin Hesburgh was born on May 25, 1917, in Syracuse, New York. Hesburgh knew he wanted to be a priest since he was six years old. After attending Most Holy Rosary High School, he enrolled in the Holy Cross Seminary at Notre Dame. He performed so well there, his instructors sent him to Rome, Italy, to attend the Pontifical Gregorian University. Hesburgh returned to the US in 1940 and earned his doctorate in sacred theology in 1945.

Hesburgh was ordained a priest in 1943 and was inspired by an inscription at Notre Dame's Sacred Heart Church to dedicate his life to "God, Country, and Notre Dame." He began teaching at the school in 1945 and, three years later, was made head of the Department of Theology.



Stamp issued for Father Hesburgh's 100th birthday.



A coil version of the sheet stamp above.

In 1952, Father Hesburgh began his 35-year Notre Dame presidency and quickly set a goal of turning the school into one of the best colleges in America. Up until that point, the school was mostly known for its football program, but Hesburgh sought to transform the school "into a nationally respected institute of higher learning." Under Hesburgh's leadership, Notre Dame introduced the Distinguished Professors Program, to encourage top educators to come and teach there. While head of the university, Hesburgh doubled enrollments, brought in millions of dollars in research grants and admitted Notre Dame's first female students in 1972.

While Notre Dame held much of his attention, Father Hesburgh still found time to travel and advocate for different causes. He received 16 presidential appointments in his lifetime, worked with the United Nations, and even represented the Vatican. Hesburgh opposed nuclear weapons, improved human rights in developing countries, and was a founding member of the Civil Rights Commission. In 1964, he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom for his Civil Rights Commission work. He also stood with Martin Luther King Jr. in Chicago and spoke about his hope for the Civil Rights Act to pass and segregation to be outlawed.



Eisenhower appointed Hesburgh to the National Science Board and US Civil Rights Commission.



Father Hesburgh holds the world record for most honorary degrees, with more than 150.

After retiring from the presidency of Notre Dame in 1987, Hesburgh wrote his autobiography and developed five institutions, including Notre Dame's Center for Civil and Human Rights and the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies. Hesburgh earned the Congressional Gold Medal in 1999 for "his outstanding and enduring contributions to civil rights, higher education, the Catholic Church, the nation, and the global community."

Father Hesburgh died on February 26, 2015. Several buildings, scholarships, and programs at Notre Dame have been named in his honor. He also holds the world's record for the person with most honorary degrees with more than 150.

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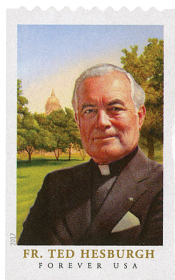
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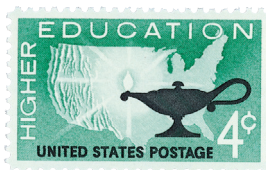
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