INTERVIEWEE: REVEREND THEODORE HESBURGH

INTERVIEWER: PAIGE E. MULHOLLAND

February 1, 1971

M: Let's identify you for the purpose of the beginning of the tape.

H: All right. My name is Theodore M. [Martin] Hesburgh, C.S.C., and I'm president of the University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana, and I assume for purposes of this particular memoir I've been a member of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights since its inception in 1957. I've been chairman for the last year and a half, but that was a President Nixon appointment.

M: Right. And let's get the date too, it's February 1, 1971.

H: February 1, yes.

M: Did you know Lyndon Johnson in any way prior to the time he became Vice President in 1961 from your work with the Civil Rights Commission after '57?

H: Not really. I think I probably met him casually. I had one particularly joyful session with him, it's on the wall there [picture], when I received the Medal of Freedom from him.

M: That was before?

H: Yes, this was before the--actually it was very early, it was early September of his first year as President.

M: You didn't get involved with him in the civil rights activities when he was still in the Senate?

H: No, I wouldn't say so. It was a very peripheral involvement in any event.

M: You served, as you said, in the Civil Rights Commission, from its

inception in 1957, so that means you served through now four presidents.

H: That's right, all four.

M: Did Mr. Johnson use the Civil Rights Commission any differently from either President Eisenhower or Kennedy, or for that matter--?

H: Yes, I think so. First of all let me say that we only met with him as a commission once to my memory, although I could be wrong on this, it could have been twice. But the once we met with him, I remember very well being it's one of my stronger memories of Mr. Johnson. The thing that he did with the commission that no other President did to my knowledge, was that he called us one day and said he wanted a special study made on racial imbalance in the public schools, and dug up somewhere a million dollars for this purpose. And we spent a full year of the commission's life with a good proportion of our staff working on that report. I didn't think we could do it in a year, but we did. It stands today as one of the classic books in the area.

Apart from that, I think he tended to do things rather directly as a President. He didn't lean too hard on us except in this one instance where he really needed something done and he needed it done rather quickly because there was a big problem with school integration at that point, and the application of Title VI and all of the rest. And I think he wanted to get this job done; we did it for him in the appointed time.

M: Did he see you personally less than other Presidents, he had less personal contact or did all of them follow the same--

H: I'd say that none of them saw a good deal of us. We saw Mr. Kennedy I think two or three times possibly. We saw Mr. Eisenhower, I believe, as a commission once, possibly twice. I guess twice because when we were inaugurated during this term we saw him, then when we made our first

report. We've seen Mr. Nixon once.

M: So you didn't get the idea that he was avoiding the commission or not utilizing it?

H: No. He knew we were around and in the nature of events, the commission is a kind of burr under the saddle, I don't think anybody in charge wants to see too much of them.

M: That may be.

H: He did put us to work though for that year, and actually it was an excellent thing to have done at that time. We would have never been able to do it ourselves because we didn't have the money for it, and I think that the fact that he was perceptive enough to ask us to do it--not that we were all that great, but we rose I think, to the occasion and did come up with a report that has become a classic in the field.

M: You say "he found the money somewhere." Does that imply that he went out and found some private money as opposed to--?

H: No, it was public money I believe. It might have come out of his emergency budget, I don't remember at the time. I think what he probably did was get us an emergency allocation through the Congress.

M: When he became President so suddenly and tragically in late 1963, did you and the members of the commission have serious doubts about what his policy on civil rights, with which you were so concerned, might be?

H: We didn't really know, although I think we felt at the time that as a Southerner he would be in a position to do something on civil rights if he wanted to that others would not be able to do. That's why we saw him rather early on, as I recall, and told him quite specifically what we thought were the crucial issues in this area. And I must say, he responded very well to these issues and at least in my own judgment, in

the area of legislation, did the greatest job of any of the four Presidents I've served under--by far.

M: Did you and the commission get an adequate chance to make your points of view heard when they were considering those acts of '64, '65?

H: I think so. We were quite active in all those acts. There was a good deal of interchange because they had groups--private groups with all the civil rights people in the government that met privately over a six-month's period. We were not ever in very close liaison--let me put it this way--with the White House as such, although we were certainly much involved in the legislation the White House was proposing.

One thing that might illustrate this better than anything else was Title VI, which I think is perhaps the most important piece of civil rights legislation, with the possible exception of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. But we brought up Title VI and as I recall, again I'm running on memory on names--I mean on dates--at the time of our Indianapolis hearing, the date of this could easily be gotten from the commission because it's a matter of record, and at that time some terrible things were happening in Indianapolis. Let me go back on that--some terrible things were happening in Mississippi, and while we were having a hearing at Indianapolis, and they had their share of the problems too, the Mississippi thing had just gotten to a point where we felt that there were murders being perpetrated; there were counties with the greatest number of black voters that didn't have a single black registered to vote there. It was almost a state of revolution, we thought, against the Constitution and the Bill of Rights as far as black people were concerned.

And when something particularly horrible happened, I don't recall

what it was at the moment, because there were so many things happening in a long series there, we put out a very short, quick report and sent it to President Kennedy. As I recall the essence of the report--again, don't hold me to the figures--was that the State of Mississippi was putting about $250 million dollars into the federal budget every year and taking out $650 million, and still yelling about state's rights. And we thought the President should tell them that unless they were going to follow federal law, the equality of opportunity in the expenditure of all these federal funds, the funds should be cut off.

Well Mr. Kennedy got very irate with us for this suggestion, why I never knew because I still think it was a very good suggestion, and he told us that we ought to reconsider. But of course we were an independent agency, if we still wanted to get the statement out and make it public, we could. And we did.

At that point he had a press conference on a number of other matters, and during the press conference said he thought this was a bad suggestion, probably unconstitutional and he didn't want that kind of power. And others in his administration talked about us as "The free-wheeling Civil Rights Commission." I think you'll find that in Sorenson's book.

My general impression is that while the Kennedy Administration got very high marks on civil rights because of the personal attractiveness of the President, and his rather outspoken manner, the simple fact is that the performance I thought was rather miserable as far as legislation. There was no legislation passed during that era, whereas on the other hand during President Johnson's time you had the Civil Rights Act of 1964, you had the Voting Rights Act of '65 and you had the Housing Act of '68. And these are three spectacular acts that couldn't have possibly been

gotten through under the kind of attitude and ideas we were getting during the Kennedy Administration. I won't say the ideas, the ideas were good, but the attitude was "don't do anything until you absolutely have to." It seemed to me anyway on the legislative side.

If you recall, the whole first year he was concerned--President Kennedy was concerned in getting the tariff thing through, and he couldn't get it through without the help of the Southern segment of the Congress, so he was not about to lean on them on the civil rights act to get it through.

I recall, we went in to see President Kennedy one day with a set of our unnegotiable demands on civil rights, things we thought absolutely had to be done; one of them had to do with integrating the National Guard, which doesn't seem like such a spectacular thing, in the State of Alabama. I believe there was something like fifty blacks in the whole National Guard in the State of Alabama, although the proportion [of blacks] actually serving in the Army at that time was quite high, higher than their place in the population, I believe. President Kennedy said at that time he was very worried about West Berlin, and that he wasn't about to complicate the situation of the Guard if he had to suddenly mobilize and send it to Berlin, this was true of the Reserves as well. He didn't want to be in the middle of a social campaign or a social-action campaign when he had to use this force as a military force.

Well, I remember on that same occasion, we said "We don't want to embarrass you, Mr. President, but in your campaign, you constantly said that President Eisenhower could have solved this housing thing with a stroke of a pen. You've been President for over a year and you haven't made that stroke of the pen." He said, "Well, we're going to have a meeting

on it in Hyannis Port this weekend and I think we'll decide to do it this weekend." The fact is, they didn't decide to do it, or he got talked out of it--I think he wanted to do it. And it was a year and a half from the beginning of his taking office until he got that order out. When he got the order out, it wasn't all that great, it had rather restrictive coverage. It's been advanced greatly of course through the Civil Rights Act of '68, and another Executive Order since then.

So against that background, in comes President Johnson and we felt early on that we should meet with him and talk with him. As I recall we went over as a whole commission to talk with him one night and--I say "one night" because it was about, as I recall, 5:30 or some such thing as that that we had this appointment. I don't remember the month, or the year even. But it was very early on in his administration. And as I recall the British were in town because I remember the door opened in that back corridor in the White House and out came all of the people I've ever heard of in the political life of Great Britain, and they walked past us down the corridor with Dean Rusk, who is an old friend of mine, which is the only reason I mention his name. And then we went in.

The President had a formal dinner coming up that night, as I recall. We were half an hour late getting in, and obviously we shouldn't stay too long because he had this dinner coming up maybe within an hour and a half, and he probably had to dress and shower beforehand. But he had been with the British all day long talking problems. And we went into the Oval Office and he said, "Gentlemen, I'm awfully weary and I've got another party ahead of me tonight, do you mind if we go in my little small office here on the side?" And we said, "Not at all."

And we went in and he had a kind of couch there and he stretched out

on the couch, he was so tired, and we sat all around the couch, practically poking our knees in his ribs because it was a rather tight little room there, and there were seven of us counting the staff director, plus himself, and he's--I've always been impressed with what a large man he was.

Well, we sat down that night and he asked us to just one at a time, or as we wished, to tell him what we thought the situation was in civil rights and what he could do about it. And while he was worried and while he was lying on his back there, and I thought I was going to see another President die right on the scene, you know, but he was listening eagerly to everything we said, I could tell.

M: He was listening, letting you all talk?

H: He was listening. And this was another thing. We were told beforehand, "You won't get a word in edgewise."

M: That's what I've heard so often.

H: "He'll twist your arm and do all the talking." The fact is, though, that he listened--maybe that was part of his being tired, but he did listen carefully. Our chairman began, John Hannah, and talked for maybe fifteen or twenty minutes. A number of other people talked, I remember Dean Griswold, I believe, and a number of others, and at the end of the--I think our vice chairman talked too, at that time was Gene Patterson I believe. And I remember it got my turn to talk and I said, "Look, we've practically covered the civil rights field, can I say something about another one of your programs?" And he said, "Certainly."

And he had a way of fixing you while you're talking, give you the eye, you know, look right at you, and you knew you were being listened to at that point. And I said, "You've got a big deal coming off now with

Shriver and this poverty program." And I said, "I understand what you're trying to do, and I'm in complete sympathy with it, but I think it's just a terrible title." I said, "When you were a youngster, you were probably poor and there may have been times you didn't have shoes." And he said, "That's right." And I said, "You didn't want some city slicker coming out to your homestead saying, 'now I'm going to help you poor people and show you how to get ahead.' You were probably perfectly happy and having a good time, and while you were poor, you didn't intend to be poor all your life and you had hope. But the word 'poor' applied to you right then, wouldn't really have described whether you were happy or unhappy, because you were probably as happy then as you are now maybe. On the other hand, you did have hope and you could work hard, and you could get an education and these things were opened up to you, and that's what equality of opportunity is all about. All I'm saying is, if you're going to put in this program,you really ought to call it the Equality of Opportunity Program, or Equal Opportunity Program, rather than the Poverty Program, because Poverty does have that kind of deprecatory or pejorative sense, that you're looking down at people and calling them poor. And you wouldn't have liked being looked down on when you were poor. You might have been happier than the city slicker who came out to tell you how to get rich."

Well, he laughed and said, "That's perfectly true, and I guess you're right. Poverty Program is a kind of bad title, it ought to be Equal Opportunity." I think it eventually did come out Equal Opportunity, but by that time Poverty had caught on and today even they call it the Poverty Program, even though I believe the bill is called Equal Opportunity.

But at that time having been suddenly turned on by this thought, I

think, of so discussing the poor, he took off himself and began to talk. We thought we were going to have been dismissed at least a half-hour before this, because by this time we were probably in there about forty-five minutes and he had, as he told us, another engagement. But he started to talk then and he said, "You know, when I came to Washington first, the country was in terrible shape and I don't know how many--there might have been thirty, forty million poor people in a population much smaller than our population today. Maybe half. And these people were really up against it, and I've seen it and I've lived through it in the South. But it was true all across the country, bread lines and everything else."

And he said, "What made me love President Roosevelt was that he really pushed forward on this thing, and he really diminished that number of poor people from maybe forty million down to thirty million, or possibly even twenty-five." He didn't know the exact number, who does? But he said, "I'd like to say that if there is only one thing I can do in the years I'm President if when I'm out of here they can say, 'when he came in there were maybe twenty-five or thirty million poor people, and now there are only twenty million or fifteen million,' then I think I will have been a good President. Because that's really the test I want to pass."

Now here was a President who was tired, who was lying on his back, who had had a long day, and a long night stretching out ahead of him. And I felt that was not just play acting, that really came from the heart. And since that moment or that night in that office I had a deep impression that here was a man that whatever you say about him, was deeply concerned about the poor, about the distressed, about the down-and-outers, those

without hope, and that he really wanted to do something about this. And that's why I think he was rather forthright in his statement on civil rights and the way that none of his predecessors were and certainly his successors have been, or his successor, I guess you have to say.

It took a lot of sheer courage for a Southerner to stand up before both houses of Congress and say, "We shall overcome." And I don't think he was doing it for play acting, I think he really meant it. I remember his voice quavering a little as he said it, and it took a lot of courage to say it because of all the overtones of Martin Luther King and everything else that was behind that in the whole movement in the South. I thought it was quite an interesting point that here in just about a year before we had been rather excoriated by President Kennedy for suggesting cut-off of funds, and in the 1964 legislation he actually put it through as Title VI and it made the whole difference. From being excoriated one time, twelve months later it becomes a matter of law.

Now I still have to say in all honesty, that I don't think that law could have been passed if President Kennedy hadn't been shot and all the resentment that built up in the country about the people that were being murdered, and Martin Luther King and all the rest helped other subsequent laws come through.

M: There is no way to measure that, although you know it's a factor.

H: You can't know it, but I've got to say the one thing I find curious and I've had to make this correction speaking to people around the world as a matter of fact, when we get into conversations about the Presidents of the United States. That there is an enormously strong myth that President Kennedy was the strongest, most courageous guy in the area of civil rights. And if you read Sorenson's book or Schlesinger's--Sorenson's I

remember particularly because there's a whole chapter on civil rights, and I said, "Is he writing about the guy that I had to do business with?" Because we were called off three times--twice, they tried it the third time and we resisted, to have a hearing in Mississippi under that administration, despite the fact it was obviously the worst state in the Union and we'd had the most complaints from there and we'd taken a oath to investigate these complaints. We finally, the day that what's his name--the attorney general with the long German name--

M: In Mississippi?

H: No, of the United States.

M: Oh, Katzenbach?

H: Yes, Katzenbach. The day he got sworn in the morning, that noon he was over at our commission meeting saying, "Don't have the hearing in Mississippi, it will complicate our trial at Philadelphia." And we said, "Look, we've already been asked to call it off twice by this administration, once by the President and once by the Attorney General, and we've got to go through or we're going to lose faith with all these people who have put their necks 'way out to testify in Mississippi against the state of affairs in voting, police brutality and the administration of justice generally." So he was very upset with us but we went ahead and had that hearing anyway. I must say, we had no suggestion of that type out of the Johnson Administration. As a matter of fact, we were pulled in for the Civil Rights White House Conference, I was put on the organizing committee for that with Cliff Alexander.

M: Oh, you were?

H: Yes.

M: This occurred later?

H: Yes. But I remember seeing the President that night which is another incident that is getting us off the track, but remind me to come back to that night of that meeting.

Well, anyway, against that background, President Johnson, I find again around the world, gets very little credit for these matters. I suppose the Viet Nam thing so blackens his reputation in a way around the world or in certain groups of intellectuals or students or whatever, that they were blinded to what he had accomplished in the field of human opportunity and civil rights. Now the fact is, that if you were to put his civil rights legislative record against any other President of the United States there just wouldn't be any contest. First, there were no civil rights laws until 1957 when President Eisenhower got through the one creating the Civil Rights Commission. There were none in the Kennedy Administration. They finally got around to proposing one after some terrible things happened, but he died unfortunately before that came to pass.

I think President Kennedy was very good administratively on civil rights. He did a lot of personal things as an administrator, as the President, but as far as the law went there was not a single law passed in his administration on this matter.

But then when President Johnson comes in you get these three tremendous laws which were unthinkable even a decade or five years before he came in. The fact that he got those through as a Southerner struck me as quite an accomplishment, and if he goes down in history for any reason, this should give him great credit. Because I think his record here is not only good it's great as compared to those who went before him and even this present administration.

M: Did he call you as a commission member sort of as an informal adviser from time to time? He was supposed to have been a great telephone user.

H: He may have called my predecessor as chairman, John Hannah, but I don't think he did. I think when we saw him we almost had to ask for an appointment. I know occasionally John Hannah did go over to see him when something came up that needed talking about.

M: I talked to John Hannah in this same project before.

H: And he, I think, did see the President as chairman when we had budget problems or other types of problems, and there was this coordinating committee meeting thing for awhile during his administration for about six months of civil rights people from various agencies around the government. But a little personal thing that let me say first of all, I was indebted to him to get the Medal of Freedom, because it's a very nice to get, first of all, quite undeserved I might add in my own case. But in any event he was very cordial about this. I brought my mother and sister down, and he was always very gracious with people like your mother or your sister or whatever, and he made them feel at home in the White House. And I remember occasionally being over there for a party in the evening for some reason or other like when King Hussein was visiting, for some reason I got invited to that party. I never figured out why.

He was always very cordial and he was always very gracious and when you'd meet him on occasions like that, I was always amazed by his energy. The fact that I left there about 1 o'clock in the morning and he was still dancing, and having a great time for himself! He had a lot of physical energy as a human being, but this particular time--I remember the night of the White House Conference on Civil Rights we had a big dinner, and I think it was either the Sheraton or the Shoreham, one of the two, the

one highest on the hill, we had it in their ballroom--the dinner that night.

There was a chap who was a Notre Dame graduate who is now vice president of the First National Bank in Chicago, John-- (I've got to get help on this one, I just never can remember this man's name)--Gleason, John Gleason. John Gleason had been head of the Veterans Administration under President Kennedy, I believe, and he was a member of this committee to help prepare, under Cliff Alexander's leadership, the White House Conference. And I checked in that morning, I ran into John and I'd gotten in very late the night before and got a few hours sleep, went down to register and then I was going to say mass at noontime right in the hotel there. So I met John at the registration desk, and I said, "Do you want to meet me at noon up in my room and we can offer mass together," and he said, "Delighted."

So we got up there at noontime, and I said, let's offer it for your son Jack (who was in Viet Nam). He was a young Marine who had graduated from Notre Dame and was in the NROTC, I believe, Naval, and had gone into the Marines and was a platoon leader over in Viet Nam, and had been there maybe nine months. And as I was getting the vestments on I said, "By the way, Jack, how is young Jack?" He said, "I had a letter from him that was mailed just forty-eight hours ago and as of then he was okay." But he said he was having a difficult time because at that time there was some trouble with the Vietnamese and our Marines were having to carry most of the patrols and the patrol had been shot up quite a bit, and it was only at about half strength. So they were carrying a little extra load, he was out of Da Nang I believe at the time.

So we offered mass for young Jack over in Viet Nam, and that night

about 7 o'clock while we were gathering to wait for the President to arrive to go into dinner, and there was some argument among the black leaders who was going to give the main talk that night. Martin Luther King won, and I remember his wife sang the "Star Spangled Banner" because I sat next to her that night at the dinner, and President Johnson on the other side of her. But while waiting around to go into dinner Jack Gleason arrived white as a sheet. And I said, "Jack are you sick?" And he said, "I just heard from the Red Cross, my boy stepped on a land mine, and it got him in both legs." And I said, "Do you have a report on what his condition is?" And he said, "No, they have flown him out to a hospital ship in a 'copter and they're going to operate on him, and I won't know until after that, or how long it'll take to get word through." And I said, "Have you called Mary Jane," his wife, and he said, "No, I thought I'd wait until I had something more definite to report, because she'll just worry."

So we went into dinner, and I thought Jack Gleason had great courage because he stayed for the whole dinner that night, even though he looked awful and probably felt worse. But he must have talked to the President during the meal because the dinner broke up around 10 o'clock, as I recall, or maybe a little bit earlier, and there was much milling around afterwards of course when the President was getting ready to leave. The President talked that night very strongly on civil rights, and I remember he turned on several occasions and looked at Floyd McKissick who was sitting on my other side and really stared him down. But Floyd apparently had just said something that didn't get on very well with the President and he was really letting him know that some of the things that he was saying were aimed at his direction. And when that glance went by me, it practically froze my nose!

M: You backed up to get out of his way!

H: That's right, it was like a ray, you know, he was really giving a real look at old Floyd. Well, anyway, the next morning I went down to see Jack very early--not very early but in the morning when I got up, to see if he had had any word on his son, and he had and the boy was going to make it all right, and saved both his legs, but the interesting thing was, he told me that at 2:30 that morning he had had a call from the President who had somehow put his own resources to work and got in touch with that hospital ship and got a complete medical report and then called Jack and gave it to him.

M: So his word came from the President.

H: So the word actually had come from the President, and I thought for a fellow to do what a President has to do all day long and then to go to that dinner which was a real mob scene, you know, we had maybe a thousand people there, and give a talk on a tough subject with everybody hanging on every word, and you make one mistake and they're all over you, and the little tensions in the group, you know, which didn't help things any, and then having heard about Jack's son.

Jack had gone into World War I as a private, and came out as a Major General. He had been wounded four times in the Pacific during the war, and he had told me, "I've been through all of this, now my son has to go through it all again." But the fact that the President had gone home and put the wheels in action and up and around to call Jack at 2:30 in the morning when he finally got word to give him the message on how his boy was, was a kind of a side of President Johnson I don't think you get in the public image.

M: Not very often. When he appointed you to help Cliff Alexander organize that

conference, what did he tell you that he wanted to accomplish by that White House Conference on Civil Rights? This would be in the summer or early fall of '67.

H: I believe so. Well, I think what he really wanted to do was get kind of a national consensus, I believe he was somewhat on his consensus kick at that time, and he wanted to get a big consensus that this was a terribly important problem, and we really should get serious and do something about it. He may have been trying to build up a little groundswell for the '68 law which was probably the most difficult of all to get through. The housing gets pretty close to the bone you know, and cuts in close there, and it's a very hard law to get through and maybe he thought he could get some help there. Also, the country was fairly polarized even then on this whole problem, and I think he felt if he could get them together and give them some hope it would help especially the black population that was very heavily represented in that meeting.

M: How much personal role did he play in moving the conference along?

H: I really think Cliff Alexander could tell you that better because I was only one of maybe fifteen or twenty organizers. We used to have meetings there in the White House Office Building and sometimes in the Cabinet Room, as I recall, and we spent a good deal of time going over the programs and putting things together, staff reports and all that. But once we got the thing moving, it was really Cliff that carried the ball on it, but the President did come that night to give the main talk and he gave a good talk.

M: Have you had any contact with him on civil rights since he left office in any way?

H: No, I really haven't, although as I mentioned earlier, in the many

discussions around the world I've bailed out his reputation in the way that came almost as complete news to people who should know better. But somehow the myth had gotten around that the Kennedy Administration was really great for civil rights and that the Johnson Administration got almost zero credit. And the fact was, it should have been just the other way around.

I think it may have been that the Kennedy Administration did a wise thing in having Schlesinger and Sorenson around, they were very good with rhetoric.

M: Johnson had one in Goldman, but it didn't come out quite that way.

H: That's right. Maybe now though this project, some things will come out, but I must say, I couldn't honestly say that I knew President Johnson well. I saw him on a number of occasions, I remember going down one day to hold the Bible when C. R. Smith, a friend of mine, was sworn in as Secretary--

M: And a friend of his too.

H: Oh, a very good friend of his, still is. On that occasion we spent some time with him, but he was always cordial and always nice. But I think what came through mostly was that he was serious about this civil rights thing and really got these laws on the books.

Now getting the enforcement of the laws is an entirely different thing. But even there, I feel he was serious about the laws and the enforcement. And that is our biggest problem today of course, you should get these laws enforced now that we have them.

M: Another of our activities, although I don't want to stop you on that one if you'd like to--

H: No, I think I've said about--

M: You were on the National Science Foundation Board for awhile. Did that last into Mr. Johnson's time?

H: No--it did really, but not in a way that got me in contact with him. I was on that from '54 to '66, it was two six-year terms, so it got us into the Johnson era, of course, for three years, wasn't it?

M: Right, but no personal contact came from that?

H: No personal really. I remember we had the 100th anniversary of the National Academy of Sciences (there's a picture over there on the wall), just a month before Jack Kennedy was shot. And so that was the big scientific event.

We actually did quite well under the Johnson Administration in funds and of course he continued what had been set up I think originally under Eisenhower with Jim Killian as science adviser, and Jerry [Jerome] Wiesner was science adviser under Kennedy. I'm trying to remember who was science adviser under--

M: That's a name I should know and don't.

H: I know the one that was very recent, of course, that was Lee DuBridge.

M: There was one in between.

H: There was one in between, that just escapes my mind at the moment, and I should know it because I was--this whole field of area of science was really a growing thing during this period.

M: No difference in policy other than you did get good funds, you said, no difference in emphasis or policy from the Kennedy to the Johnson years?

H: I wouldn't think so. I think the country was really on the upswing during those years, and there was good money around and we weren't bogged down in Viet Nam yet, that wasn't really an issue. There was a cloud about as small as a man's hand, that was about all.

And we were doing some good things in science, we had a number of--the Year of the Quiet Sun--we had earlier wound up the International Geophysical year, and I remember during that period I went down to the Antarctic for the Science Foundation, down to the South Pole and found marvelous work down there. And things were going so well that nothing stands out in your mind very well.

M: Well, it avoids the President's attention if it's going that well.

H: That's right. Not big points of tension or big problems. I know the Vice President used to come through pretty strong--Hubert Humphrey--on the whole civil rights thing. And in a sense you tended to meet him more often than the President on the operational level because he appeared and gave talks at these civil rights functions around town, even scientific functions too. Of course he was head of the--what was it, the space program, the NASA Council.

That was another interesting thing with Johnson, although I don't know that the President--personally I can't imagine he didn't know anything about it because it had gone pretty far when it got to me, but I got a call during the last year of his administration from Jim Webb and he said he had to see me right away. At the time he tracked me down I was in Williamsburg, Virginia, for the annual meeting of the Rockefeller Foundation board. And I said, "Well, Jim, I'm right in the middle of a board meeting, and we're winding up at noon tomorrow. I can see you after that." And he said, "Well, it's very important, I'll send a car and a plane for you." I said, "Look I can get to the airport, tell me which airport the plane will be at and I'll be there." He said, "Patrick Henry," and I said, "Okay."

So he sent the NASA plane down, and had a little box lunch aboard, and as soon as we got through the meeting I ran out in the car to get down

to the plane and went to Washington. He had a car there to take me over to his office. I couldn't imagine what was so urgent about all of this. I had known Jim for years because we were on a number of things at MIT and other places, a number of councils, committees, and you get to have a fraternity of people you meet in all these things.

M: Right.

H: You meet them coming and going.

M: What they called "the establishment," you shouldn't admit that!

H: I don't know what it is, but whatever it is these people you would meet sometimes several times a week. I can recall days when I used to meet Jim Killian at least three times a week on three different things.

Well anyway, we go off to Jim's office and he was full of energy and bounce as usual and he said, "I want you to know Father Ted, that I'm getting out of this job. Mr. [Robert] Seamans just left, my assistant, and we'd had some problems, but" he said, "I've really been going flat out for so long and I think I'm just about ready for a little change and rest." And I said, "Jim, you'll never rest." He said, "Well, a change anyway." And he said, "I've been looking the country over for a successor, and I think we're coming at a point in this space program where we're coming up against some very tough philosophical and theological questions--questions that are basically at heart philosophical and theological." And he explained what he meant by that, some of the things that he said he wished I wouldn't repeat so I won't. But they were enormously broad and difficult and troublesome questions involving the world, different nations of the world, and different realities of world economics, world politics, would begin to press in for some solution and would grow out of the space activity of our nation.

He said, "I also think it's important that the head of this agency, the administrator, have a knowledge of the scientific community and the educational community." And he said, "The last point I think is important in my search, is that there's a kind of crisis of leadership around this town today in some ways, and I think that the man who comes in has to be a man that no one can have any possible thoughts that he wouldn't merit the highest confidence, that would be noted for his integrity in whatever he's doing." "Well," he said, "I think you fill that bill and you ought to come in in Bob Seamans' place as the deputy and as soon as you pick my brain, which you ought to be able to do in a month or two, take on the job as administrator." And he said, "If you're willing, we'll go right to the White House and nail it down right now."

And I was kind of astounded to hear this. And I said, "Jim, I think you're out of your mind. I'm flattered as anybody would be by what nice things you said, but I just don't think this is necessarily the place for a priest. I may be wrong," I said, "this is my offhand opinion."

He said, "Well, would I have to see somebody to talk them into it," I said, "No, if I really wanted to do it and thought I should do it, I'm sure I could do it, there wouldn't be any problem about it." He said, "Well, don't you want to have a moral influence in this world?" And I said, "Sure, but I'm not sure I want to do it as head of the space agency!" I said, "I can think of having just the opposite kind of influence if it involves the lives and destinies of so many thousand people that I'd be head of and the expenditure at that time of some six billions of dollars. Whatever else I am I am a priest and I always want to be a priest, I'm not trying to hide the fact, and I can't disassociate my operating as a public administrator from being a priest and thinking like a priest as I should.

And while that may help on the integrity side, it might also hurt on the side of people who take a dim view of having a priest as their boss." And I said, "The day may come when priests will move in and out of public life more freely," I said, "As a matter of fact I think it is coming right now."

M: One was recently elected to Congress.

H: That's right, Bob Drinan who is Dean of Law at Boston College. But I said, "Right now, I'm not convinced that I should do this. I can help you as I have helped you in an advisory capacity anytime you want, I'll put in as many days, hours that you need to help on any of these questions you've talked about." I said, "I've spent about--Well, I've spent as much as 120 days a year working for the federal government in three or four different jobs at the same time, and I've never spent less than 50 in the last 15 years--50 days a year working for the federal government. And I'm willing to do that, but I've done it in a lot of advisory commissions-board type activities, that don't require any line position of authority where you've got to start cutting people's throats or doing the kinds of things that cause enmity, or raised eyebrows if you did them as a priest."

M: He didn't say the President knew about this, but he did say you'd go to the White House--

H: No. "We'll go right now and tie it up."

M: Which implies at least--

H: It is implied, but again, I don't want to make the jump. I said, "Jim, let me say I find you rather broad-minded in all of this." He said, "Well, I'm a good Presbyterian, but it wouldn't bother me two minutes to have you. As a matter of fact you're the one I want." I said, "Well,

that's very nice. I have to tell you, I don't think--

M: I'm glad you didn't take the job, you wouldn't be here today--you'd be down here with real problems.

H: Yes. I'd be having more fun.

M: I have the impression from somewhere that you got called in one of these advisory capacities in some of the urban disorders. Did you have some connection with Detroit riots for example?

H: Only again peripherally. Jack Hannah was in Detroit the day it was burning. He was at a meeting of the Bell Telephone Company; he stood up there and watched it. I think I talked to him from there right after that.

We'd been peripherally involved in a lot of things, but we tried on balance to keep the commission from being a fire department operation. For example, we were called in--by the present administration on the Black Panther thing, we recently got very much pressure to go into Los Angeles on the Salazar killings. I suppose what happened yesterday, we may get more pressure. But we have felt the commission is a long-range activity, where we do the tough grinding study, and we make the long-range propositions for the kinds of laws and the kinds of administrative practice that will correct the situation and that nobody else is going to do that, but we have put out about 60 full-fledged books, the latest one running in that edition anyway 1115 pages, a monumental study. And we have put out probably 300 reports--printed reports--on state situations, a hospital here a prison there and so forth. And we have had over 80 percent of our recommendations to the President and Congress passed into federal law, which is pretty good considering that until 1957 when the commission was created there hadn't been a civil rights law in eighty years.

M: And compared to all the other commissions who have been formed since then, and usually forgotten about immediately.

H: Oh yes, not much has happened. As a matter of fact President Eisenhower told us that he was amazed when we came up with our first report. He didn't think we'd come up with anything. He was very frank, he told us so. Because he said, "Here you are, you are three Republicans, three Democrats, and three Southerners and three Northerners," and I said, "Mr. President, you made a mistake. We were six fishermen and we wrote this report up in a fishing camp in Wisconsin!"

M: You can't write that into law!

H: I think the commission has had almost too much impact for its size and ability, but the reason I think is of course that there were all of these other side pressures and the whole student movement and the whole civil rights movement, and the pressure for voting and the pressure for desegregation and all the other things, plus a lot of tragedies. Sadly I have to admit this country has made its real progress moving forward from tragedy to tragedy, and after a tragedy like the death of President Kennedy or Martin Luther King or Bobby Kennedy we always make a jump forward, because people are ashamed of the image portrayed by the nation.

M: But you didn't have any presidential contact with the Detroit situation?

H: No, that got into the Violence Committee really, as I recall, the Violence Commission.

M: Right. It was still in President Johnson's term When you won your most wide notoriety, I guess is the safest thing to call it, with your statements on campus unrest. Did he talk to you about that?

H: No, actually that was during the first year of Nixon's Administration.

M: I thought it was late '68.

H: No, it was February of '69.

M: Okay, so Johnson wouldn't have been the one to call then.

H: No. Actually President Nixon wrote me a letter about it.

M: What about Johnson and the students--you were here during all those years. Do you think he ever made any genuine efforts to deal with the campus unrest and the campus dissent, that he understood it at all?

H: I'm not sure that he did, I really can't say because I never really discussed it with him. I have to say that I think that he got so boxed in by that Viet Nam war and that the students and protesters got so vociferous and so vituperative at that point, that I think it was just a constant source of embarrassment for him to have to go out to a campus, say, or something of this sort.

M: He got to where he didn't do it toward the end.

H: Toward the end he got into a bit of a cocoon almost, but I think he almost had to. I think he had some strong sense of the presidency as every president has, he didn't want to expose it to be ridiculed or something of this sort which might have happened. The great tragedy I think is, here's a man who on the domestic scene really made enormous efforts, made great breakthroughs in civil rights and then got just a terrible name on Viet Nam that was bad in the sense that it overflowed the other things that he had done that were good, and kind of buried them under the Viet Nam brush, if you will.

M: Did you ever talk to him about the Viet Nam issue at length?

H: No. Not at length. I think he got on that course, and I think it was just almost impossible for him to get off of it until--Clark Clifford really I think gets the credit for getting him off it. And I just think that he was being so strongly advised, as far as I read the history of it,

and again this is secondhand, so maybe it isn't worth even saying, but the way I read it is Clifford finally said, "We've had it, there's not going to be 100,000 more soldiers sent to Viet Nam." Because we've heard that so many times in the past and we've been led down this primrose path by the military and now we're going to start reversing it.

M: Are there other issues in which he called on you? What about foreign aid?

H: Yes, I was on the foreign aid task force he had, called the Perkins Commission. I signed that report. I came on a little bit late in the game, they had already been at it for awhile, but I did go over the final report and signed it. I was also on Walt Rostow's Policy Planning Commission of the State department during that period, during Johnson's time.

M: Was it being utilized at all or--

H: We had a couple of meetings and I don't think the State Department people enjoyed them and that was the end of that. I think it was real in Rostow's mind and I think he found it useful, but I think it was a bit tortuous in the minds of people like Dean Rusk and the others over there who somehow, I believe, felt we were a bunch of guys in left field coming in telling them how to do something that they knew better how to do themselves.

I remember during that period it was curious because we had a couple of issues that came up in a meeting one day and they of course are the experts and were the experts and we were just a few people brought in. We were told to be a sounding board to react to their expertise. Well, the two issues that were brought up this day, and these were supposed to be very confidential because I'd gotten all the papers by messenger and was told to read them and to copy nothing, and to send them back by

messenger. They weren't even put in the mail.

Well, the curious thing was, when I read these papers, I'd prefer not to say what they were about, but they happened to be about something that I'd had some overseas experience with and involvement for over, at that time I guess, more than a decade. And I knew many of the personalities involved from the many nations of the world. And it turned out I knew more myself than was in those papers, and so when we got to that point in the discussion I simply denied what the paper had alleged, and they said, "Well, you've got no basis for doing that." And I said, "The gentleman who is head of this whole activity for his government told me this two weeks ago, now you don't have to believe him because he happens to be a Communist, but I can tell you that he hasn't told me a lie over the last fourteen years, and he's a man in charge of this for his government. This is what he told me two weeks ago in Europe." And it kind of--I think it was a curious type of thing.

The next thing on the agenda had to do with labor and, you know, labor in the overseas dimension, and at that point it turns up that Walter Reuther was also a member of this group and knew more about this subject than was in the memorandum. And when he was pressed to the wall the way I was to back up his statements contrary to what was in the memorandum, it turned up that within the last two weeks, he'd talked to the labor ministers in England, in Stockholm, in Germany, and as a result had, like myself, first-hand information from the people we were talking about. And they had said, "Yes, of course we said this publicly, but here's what we really mean and this is what we're going to do." Whereas the State department had taken the public pronouncements as a matter of policy, we had had access to the people who made the pronouncements and themselves

repudiated them in private. And said their real intention was such-and-such.

M: I can imagine the State department didn't take extremely kindly to--

H: I think that was our last meeting. Besides, Walt Rostow soon moved over to the White House and it was a different activity for him. If he had stayed with the State department, I am sure it would have continued. I had gotten to know him when he was in Chile, I was down there in Peace Corps business and he had a meeting of those seven Wise Men when Ralph Dungan was ambassador down in Santiago, and I happened to be Ralph's guest that weekend so he brought me into the meeting. We got to be good friends following that.

M: I've interviewed both Rostow and Dungan, and have gotten that three times now, the Wise Men meeting!

H: That was a great meeting, we really enjoyed it.

M: Dungan's description of the press part of it was interesting.

H: The whole thing was extremely interesting and I really enjoyed Ralph Dungan as an ambassador, and I certainly enjoyed Walt Rostow, who's a very, very bright fellow. It's unfortunate that he's kind of in the doghouse academically, I think, because of his stance on the war and so forth.

But he is a bright, always most cordial type of fellow, and his wife is a dear too.

M: She's teaching full time at Texas.

H: Yes, she's a great gal, and two nice youngsters.

M: What about your role as Vatican representative on the IAEA? Did they get you into disarmament matters?

H: Oh, in a kind of vague way. They really got started because of the U.S. government rather than the Vatican. You see, when they set up the statute

conference for the IAEA, International Atomic Energy Agency, they decided that they would invite in at that time not only all the members of the UN but all the members of the specialized agencies of the UN. And this was an interesting move because it immediately put places like the Vatican, which is a state as well as a church, and which belonged to some of the things like UNICEF and others, brought them in on the invitation list, and Pius XII was the Pope at that time and he turned it down because he just simply felt he didn't have anything to say about atomic energy, at least none of his people in the diplomatic corps over there knew anything about atomic energy except as a word. The then Secretary of State--I'm fuzzy in my mind on this but it would be easily checked out because it was in September of 1956--Christian Herder--

M: No, it was still Dulles.

H: Still Dulles then. So at any case the Secretary of State called Cardinal Spellman and said, "Look, we're having this conference and it's for a brand new agency, atomic energy, the peaceful use of atomic energy, and a tough thing. We've been working two years on it, a statute for it, and a tough article on the statutes, the one on inspection and control. And we've just got to get this through, because it will lay the groundwork for any future disarmament, it will get people used to living with inspection and control in a non-military context, and the peaceful use of nuclear energy. And if they learn to live with nuclear reactors for power they may learn to live with it also for military uses, and also develop techniques to do it efficiently to do the kind of checking that has to be done and develop a whole agency to do it, through this IAEA."

Which was a good prediction as a matter of fact, because the

non-proliferation treaty came through, it actually specified IAEA as the body to do this. Well, anyway, the Secretary of State said, "I think we'd like to get as many people there as possible that would be on the side of the angels on this issue, and we assume that the Vatican will be, and can you get them to appoint somebody, they've turned down the invitation." So Cardinal Spellman just called up Pius XII and Pius XII told him what I've just told you, that he had nobody in the diplomatic corps that knew anything about atomic energy and if Cardinal Spellman could find a couple of people he would be willing to appoint them.

So I got a call one morning at 8 o'clock from Cardinal Spellman saying, "Would you do this?" I had just had several weeks' meeting in Europe, plus six weeks in Latin America checking out universities down there and the school year was beginning, and it was a very bad time, but I had had to turn him down the year before on another matter, so I said, "Well, if you think it's very important I'll do it." He said, "I think it's very important." So I said, "Okay, I'll do it," not knowing what I was getting myself into. He said it would be a couple of days in New York and it turned out that it was Monday until Saturday in New York for the next six or seven weeks, and doing my work at the University here on weekends and flying back again.

The interesting thing there was that it turned out exactly as predicted. This one article on inspection and control was the real bone of contention. Nobody could argue about using atomic energy peacefully, and that was what everybody wanted, but the Communist countries were all against inspection and control because of their kind of xenophobia. The countries like India were very sticky because they said it was an infringement on their sovereignty to have people coming and checking on what they were doing,

and that even--there were many countries violently fighting against this particular article, which was the most important article in the whole charter.

I remember so well the Swiss ambassador at that time was a fellow named Gus Lindt, who subsequently became head of refugee program and was ambassador to Russia following that. He had a very distinguished career in Switzerland. He came to me on a Friday night as we were winding up about two weeks of very acrimonious debate on this article, and he said "I think you ought to say something." I said, "This is my first international conference, I've been playing the school boy, I'm doing a lot of listening, but I felt I had not a great thing to contribute at this point." He said, "Well, you've got something great to contribute right now," he said, "We're going to crank this discussion up on Monday probably, or Tuesday at the latest. We've got to wind it down and get the conference over, and we've got to bring it to a vote, and you ought to be the last guy to speak before they vote, because it's your job"--and he was speaking in French, he said, "Hausser le niveau de la discussion (lift up the level of the discussion)." And I said, "Well, I don't know that I can, but I'll try."

And I went home that weekend, and besides cleaning up the weeks' work tried to get this talk on what might be called the philosophy of control or the rationale of control, and trying to point out that our whole lives are controlled by many things, physical laws, moral laws and a whole lot of other things. Things that we may not like at times but they make life rational and they certainly insure its peacefulness. So I wrote the best talk I could and it just happened that Monday I had to miss the meeting in New York because we had a National Science Board meeting in Washington. I was meeting myself coming and going that fall. So I went to the Science

Board meeting in Washington, but I left my number with the president of the conference. If it looked like it was going to conclude on Monday afternoon, he could call me and I would get a plane and come up there.

Well, I got a call about 11 o'clock at the Science Board meeting saying "Please come right away, because this is going to wrap up before 5 o'clock tonight." I ran out to the airport and got the first airplane to New York, and it lost an engine and we had to come back. Got on a second airplane and when I finally dropped into the seat, out of breath because of the quick change, I looked at my seat mate and it was Harold Stassen, who had been very much involved in all this business of disarmament. So I immediately whipped out my talk I'd prepared for the UN conference and had him go through it. I must say that he was very helpful because he saw a lot of things that I was too naive or too inexperienced to see. He'd say, "You've got to make this a little tougher, and you've got to say this twice because they won't get it if you only say it once." He was very helpful.

M: What kind of law would you say governed that kind of accident!

H: I don't know, but it was really amazing. Because I got to New York, I got the first cab I could get and told them to hurry. I got to the conference ten minutes before the end of the discussion, I puffed into the conference room, sat in my seat, and was called on and gave the final talk and we won the vote. I'm not claiming that my final talk did anything, but I think it at least did wind up on a rational note rather than emotion or non-rational vote. At least out of that grew the friendship of a lot of people that endured over the years.

M: And as you say, it was important. It's now the best hope for inspection in the current negotiations. Did you get involved in the NPT association

at all?

H: As the Vatican representative of course, we had many discussions on this in Vienna at the annual meeting. I went to every annual meeting from 1956, they began in Vienna in '57; we had one in Tokyo, all the rest were in Vienna, I didn't miss one until I resigned this past year when Mr. [Frank] Folsom who is my associate on the Vatican delegation, died last January or so. I just didn't quite want to face the thing of starting over again with somebody else. Besides, fourteen years is a long time in one activity, and I thought we had done what we could.

Well, a few years ago in the NPT was coming up, we sent a very strong report to the Vatican suggesting as strong as we could that they sign it just for the moral influence, and they have signed it. It took a little time, but all diplomatic things take time.

M: Do they ever! Are there any other issues that I missed or not been fortunate enough to come across in which you were involved with President Johnson?

H: I think you have covered the ground pretty well. Perhaps too well. I feel like I get too loquacious on things of this sort.

M: This business of Vienna, even though it's early, is the kind of thing that oral history is good for, because that story is not in a document.

H: It's nowhere except in my head, and now on this machine, about running into Harold Stassen.

M: So those kind of things make historians sometime, I hope, write a better history, at least a more readable history.

H: Well, it's also a very interesting thing that the--I'm just trying to think of--I doubt if there's any agency of UN that Vatican is a full-fledged charter member of.

One little interesting point, and this has nothing to do with President Johnson but they fill out the story about that charter meeting in '56 at the UN. When I agreed to take the job--after the call from Cardinal Spellman to take it, I said, "Look, I'd like to put in two qualifications." He said, "What are those?" I said, "Well, I'm an American citizen, and while Vatican is listed as a state, it's a pretty small mile-square state, but just the same formally and technically it is listed in this conference as Vatican State." Since then they've listed it as Holy See, which is a little more complicated, but at any event at that point I was delegate from Vatican City and I sat in "murderers' row" there with U.S., U.S.S.R., U.K., Uruguay and Vatican City, we sat five at a table, and that was where all the action was. Not particularly from Uruguay but from the other three, and I got to know their delegates quite well, all of them, because we were sitting close together that whole conference.

But I told him the two conditions were, because I was an American citizen, and because I was presumably being appointed to this since they didn't know anything about it, I wanted full power and no instructions. Because if they didn't know anything about it I didn't want them instructing me about what to say or do. I felt that was a fairly logical position. And he said, "I think it's perfectly right and I'll get it." I got a cable the next morning, and following that my credentials in French. Also, they said I could pick anybody to work with me on this, and I picked Dr. [Harold] Marston Morse, who was second in command at Princeton Institute of Advanced Study; he was a mathematician. He had lectured one semester a year in France, and knew French well, and I figured he'd be very helpful, and besides he was the scientist-type.

He couldn't make it to Vienna because of his family obligations, then Mr. Frank Folsom, who had been president of RCA and who had been on the Committee of the Congress under Robert McKinney, to do the study on the peaceful use of nuclear energy, was loose at that time. He had just stepped down from being president and his wife had just died, so I asked him to come on with me. But those credentials of ours held up over the years, and none of the credential officers would ever believe them when we'd come in: Plein pouvoir pour discuter, approver et signer quelconque texte (full power to discuss, approve, sign any text).

Well, we eventually elaborated this charter text and I recall on a certain day we had to sign the text for our particular country and it had to be ratified by the appropriate authorities in the country you are signing for. The protocol officer came around to all of us and said "you'll have to get a cable from your government saying that you are authorized to sign this." So I called up Cardinal Spellman and said, "I guess I need a cable from Vatican saying I'm authorized to sign it." He said, "You've got the power, use it." I said, "I know I have the power, but the protocol officer at the UN says that no one in the whole organization has this kind of power; even though they're called plenipotentiary they really aren't, they all have to get clearance to sign a treaty from their government; and even though it says I've got full approval to sign they won't accept it." So he said "Okay," and the next day I got a cable.

M: You had double authority.

H: I had double authority. But it's interesting over the years that they held up. And we didn't get instructions and we were able to write our own instructions.

M: Are there any other matters that you think need to go on here?

H: I think you've got about everything that you could possibly think of here, Paige.

M: Okay, thank you very much, sir, I appreciate your cooperation.

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Gift of Personal Statement

By Theodore Hesburgh

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, Theodore Hesburgh, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

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Signed Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C.

Date Dec. 5, 1972

Accepted Harry Middleton, for
Archivist of the United States

Date Dec. 11, 1972

University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, Indiana 46556

Office of the President

Cable Address "Dulac"

September 10, 1973

Lyndon B. Johnson Library
Austin,
Texas

Dear Sirs:

I received the enclosed letter from one of my former fellow Commissioners on the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, Mr. Erwin Griswold, former Dean of Harvard Law School.

You will note that what the Dean has to say adds to a section in the "oral history" which I presented regarding President Johnson and civil rights. You might append it to the appropriate page for the use of anyone studying the subject.

All best wishes.

Cordially yours,

(Rev.) Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C.
President

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September 4, 1973

The Rev. Theodore Hesburgh, C.S.C.
University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, Indiana

Dear Father Ted,

Needless to say, I read with much interest the report of your "oral history" which appeared in the recent issue of the Civil Rights Digest. It gave a lot of background and color and information which will be useful in any overall consideration of the work of the Civil Rights Commission.

I fully agree with you that President Johnson was far more effective in advancing the Civil Rights cause than President Kennedy was. Nevertheless, it was not always sweetness and light with President Johnson.

In particular, it was during President Johnson's administration that Nicholas Katzenbach came to a meeting of the Civil Rights Commission and more or less demanded we not go ahead with the plan for hearings in Mississippi. As you may recall, he had been Acting Attorney General for several months, and the day he appeared before us was the day on which he was nominated to be Attorney General. This nomination was by President Johnson, and I believe that the month was February, 1965, after the resignation of Robert Kennedy as Attorney General, and some fourteen months or so after President Johnson had taken office.

Of course, I well remember that meeting which we had with President Johnson, in the little room adjacent to the Oval Office. That was in February, 1964, about four months after he became President. John Hannah had been trying to get a meeting with President Johnson, but had been unsuccessful. I then went to Abe Fortas at his office on 19th Street, and told him of our problem. It was only about half-an-hour later that LBJ called me on the telephone at the Mayflower Hotel, and set up the appointment for that evening. We went over together and had the memorable meeting which you described.

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