

Theodore Hesburgh, longtime Notre Dame president, dies at 97

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Theodore Hesburgh, the longtime president of the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, died February 26 at age 97.

For more than 50 years, he engaged issues such as civil rights, nuclear weapons, and abortion.

The *National Catholic Reporter* wrote that in 1968 he said, “Theology must be free, for it will be accepted as a true university discipline only if operates under the same kind of freedom and autonomy as do other disciplines.”

He was ordained as a priest of the Congregation of the Holy Cross in 1943 and became president of Notre Dame in 1952. He held the position for 35 years. He received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1964, and the Congressional Gold Medal in 2000. He was a founding member of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and marched with Martin Luther King Jr.

At Notre Dame, *NCR* reported, he “was not able to find a balance between the male and female faculty, for the latter complained of unequal treatment and opportunities.”

Michael Wear, who served in the Obama White House, met Hesburgh when President Obama accepted an invitation to deliver the commencement address at Notre Dame in 2009, sparking protests because of Obama’s support of abortion rights.

“Hesburgh believed providing space for different viewpoints was a testament to one’s confidence in his or her beliefs,” [Wear wrote](#). —Religion News Service, added sources