

That Person Should Be the Next President Who...

With this issue *Worldview* initiates a series of reflections on the person who in this Bicentennial year will be elected chief executive of the United States. What are the principal issues that need to be addressed? What kind of leadership do we need, and what can we realistically anticipate? The editors are pleased to begin this series with the reflections of Robert Coles, Theodore Hesburgh, and Herbert Scoville.

ROBERT COLES Says

That person *should* be the next President who is willing to make a major issue of who owns what in our economic system. I am not saying that a candidate who is interested in explicitly and candidly analyzing our economic system stands a good chance of being nominated, let alone being elected President. I am simply saying that for me one of the major problems confronting this nation is the enormous disparity between the rich and the upper middle class on the one hand and, on the other, the working people and the poor, who make up the overwhelming majority of our people. I value this country's political institutions; they are not to be dismissed lightly. They are imperfect and have recently been subjected to severe stress. But they offer each of us a precious degree of freedom. One need only look elsewhere in the world to realize how fortunate we are in that respect—and how fragile such freedom is, and potentially vulnerable to deadly assault, even in the Western democracies. But we have been far less successful in achieving for each of our citizens a reasonable degree of social and economic justice.

I suppose I am somewhat anarchic, cranky, or eccentric. I distrust big government as well as big business. Dorothy Day is a hero of mine; I subscribe to the ideas of the Catholic Worker movement. I revere Simone Weil and George Orwell. At times I am willing to call myself a Christian Socialist, but I distrust government-imposed socialism: the awful threat of dictatorship; bureaucratic arrogance and cruelty; the daily betrayal of once noble ideals. If some big businessmen are vain and self-serving, so are a number of intellectuals or radical ideologues. I would like to see more rural cooperatives in this country. I would like to see workers gain access to the ownership of the factories they work in. I would like to see every person guaranteed, as a matter of public policy, a job and a decent standard of living. I would like to see corporate power curbed drastically—yet, I worry about the federal government becoming the instrument of such goals, even in the unlikely assumption that such a “role” for the

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Robert Coles
(photo: Jill Krementz)



Father Hesburgh

government is soon to be possible.

We hear all the time these days that the liberalism of the New Deal Democratic Party variety is “bankrupt,” or no longer has “solutions” for the various problems we have. Maybe so—though I think a number of our present difficulties would indeed respond to more humane and intelligent federal policies than the kind we now have. One thinks of a national health insurance program, of a minimum family income policy, of a federally sponsored and backed rural cooperative network, of an effective mine safety law, of the many forms of environmental protection that the Congress, urged on by the President, could provide us. But it is true that at some point in this nation's history we are going to have to come to terms with the issue of values, of ethical principles. Are our resources the property of all of us, or of the person or company that happens to get them first, to exploit them the fastest? Are we to live fat and sassy—even supposing that was the case for all of us—while most of the other people on this earth live in terrible poverty and slowly starve to death? Do we have no obligation to align ourselves with the weak and suffering and persecuted, at whatever cost to our own traditional interests?

I suppose I have in mind a President who would begin to renounce those interests, who would attack the “powers and principalities” at home and abroad in a radically Christian way. And how would such a man stand even the remotest chance of becoming President? Christ did sanction guile, but there are limits to serpentine politics, especially when one wants to make quite clear what has been brushed under various carpets for years—the enormous significance in America not only of race but of class.

Perhaps we will come nearest to an open discussion of some of these issues through the populist tradition, shorn (one hopes) of its narrow, parochial, and often, alas, racist side. There have been authentic and important American radicals; they have never come near occupancy of the White House, but they have exerted their influence on us—a Debs and, yes, a Huey Long. Ours is a rich, powerful, rather complicated, and—as nations go—rather stable and conservative country. I rather suspect, from what I have heard over the years, talking with working-class people in various regions, that many of us are at once quite cautious, quite hesitant to embrace any kind of radical politics, yet at certain moments quite radically critical of the existing social and economic system, if afraid to say so openly. Strong-minded and outspoken populists, intent on bringing about radical changes in our economic system, have, historically, been elected to high office—to the Senate, to the House of Representatives, but not to the White House. Maybe such men and women will never affect our history that directly and forcefully as nationally chosen leaders. One at least hopes that a populist tug will grow stronger, compelling an increasingly favorable response, even if hedged or less than wholehearted, from the more “moderate” men who do get elected to the Presidency in the coming years.

THEODORE M. HESBURGH Says

That person should be the next President who has a great vision of what America can be in the years ahead. Some people have said that America is suffering from a dearth of leadership. One speaks of the present situation here and abroad as the “Age of Midgets,” compared to the World War II period that saw Churchill, Roosevelt, De Gaulle, Dr. Gasperi, Adenauer, and other greats leading the way. Others have compared the leadership of the colonial period to today’s. Then we were a collection of small colonies with three million people, who produced Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Franklin, Hamilton, and others. Who compares to their leadership today when we are a nation of more than two hundred million people? Whatever one says about leadership, it seems to me that vision is still more important as a focal point. Leaders have to lead somewhere—and that somewhere reflects their vision or lack of it.

What would be a great vision of America? I believe that it would include many elements, especially the following. Traditionally, America has been a land of opportunity and compassion. We engraved at the base of the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor:

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

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Who were those who answered that invitation and responded to that dream of hope? All of our grandparents and great or great great-grandparents. Unless you are an American Indian or black, your forebears came to America in hope of freedom, opportunity, a new and better life.

The fact is that America has done well by most of us, but not all. We still have our masses huddled in ghettos, barrios, and reservations, yearning still to breathe free. We still have millions of people in America so poorly housed as to be practically homeless. And we have a vast, blue-collar working class that may have homes, heavily mortgaged, and with unemployment and inflation beating against them, feeling rather tempest-tost. A lamp still needs to be lit for all of these if America is to be for them a golden door to a better life. Whoever aspires to lead America in the years ahead must have a veritable fire in his belly to make this promise of America come true for those who still glimpse it from afar, even though they are within our blessed shores. Lyndon Johnson once told me that if there were a few million less poor and hopeless people in America after his Presidency, that would be the best test of whether he had been a good President.

America and Americans are still haunted by this pristine dream of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, even though it eludes so many. Whoever aspires to lead America must be possessed and even obsessed by this vision of what we profess to be and yet are not. Visions like this are not realistic unless one is willing to start over continually to make the dream come true. We cannot achieve this incessant goal in 1976 with all of the old and tired programs of the thirties, forties, fifties, and sixties; although each of them did indeed promise hope to many, and did deliver, however imperfectly, to some. The new leader must begin anew, must be able to enlist the most creative, imaginative, effective thinkers and leaders in the land to dare to initiate new programs that speak of realistic hope, not empty rhetorical utopias. And he and they must follow the vision as the highest priority of all: more important than defense, because this is what we are defending in America; more pressing than political expediency, because too often politics has abandoned the hopeless at the water’s edge.

Make no mistake about it, democracy is on the way out all around the world, not only in Russia and China, but in India, Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia, where most of the world’s population lives. If there is any place on earth where we can demonstrate that government of the people, for the people, by the people is workable, it has to be here in America. If we fail, the game is finished, liberty and justice are lost, the dream of the founders ended for all the world.

Our next Presidential aspirant may be intelligent, honest, decent, even wise, but if he or she does not realize what America is really about, what the founders dared dream to create, what vision drew millions to our shores to make the most variegated population on earth—then he or she cannot really lead us to the promised land. Vision comes first. Without vision the people perish.

HERBERT SCOVILLE, JR., Says

That person should be the next President who is prepared to make a major and serious effort to bring nuclear weapons under control and reduce the risks that the world will be devastated by the scourge of nuclear war.

Thirty years ago the United States dropped two atomic bombs destroying the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing and maiming hundreds of thousands of people. Since then the world has been spared the use of nuclear weapons in warfare, but in the meantime four additional countries have produced nuclear weapons and a fifth, India, has tested a nuclear explosive under the rubric of a "peaceful" program. Meanwhile, the U.S. has built up a stockpile of some 30,000 such weapons, and continues to add to this at the rate of three or more each day. The U.S. has developed weapons with an explosive force more than a thousand times that of the Hiroshima bomb, and the Russians have set off explosions several times larger.

Leaders of both nations have, year after year, professed a desire to achieve controls over such weapons, but the sad facts are that we have not signed a single arms control agreement that would significantly reduce the scale of horror that can be loosed on the world. Only the ABM Treaty of 1972 significantly lowered the risks of nuclear warfare by guaranteeing a state of mutual deterrence, but the benefits of this treaty were to a large extent frittered away as both we and the Russians, like nuclear alcoholics, increased our offensive weapons stockpiles despite the reduced need for them. Since SALT I the U.S. has increased the numbers of its strategic nuclear warheads from 2,800 to about 9,000. We have deployed nearly a thousand missiles equipped with provocative MIRVs (multiple reentry vehicles that can be independently aimed at separate targets), and we have started development on several new classes of strategic weapons—such as cruise missiles and more accurate "counterforce" ICBMs. The Vladivostok Accord, signed by Gerald Ford and Leonid Brezhnev, established such high ceilings that they limited no planned programs of either country, and yet since then Secretary of State Kissinger has proposed to add new classes of weapons on top of these ceilings. The U.S. and the USSR have cynically negotiated a Threshold Test Ban, which is a sham, setting back rather than advancing our long-stated aim of halting all nuclear tests. Arms control negotiations have become a mechanism for promoting the arms race rather than controlling it.

Meanwhile, our announced policies have increased the risks that a nuclear conflict will actually break out. During the 1960's we had moved away from the Dulles policy of massive retaliation, and the firebreak between the use of conventional and nuclear arms was strengthened. However, in the last two years even this hopeful trend has been reversed. Following the collapse in Southeast Asia President Ford and other lead-



ers have threatened to initiate the use of nuclear weapons in Korea and in Europe. Former Secretary of Defense Schlesinger even threatened a selective strategic nuclear strike on the Soviet Union as a response to conventional aggression. He pressed the development of "counterforce" missiles, which can threaten the Soviet ICBM deterrent. All of these actions increase the danger that any conflict will rapidly become nuclear or that holocaust will occur by accident.

Simultaneously, the energy crisis has provided a major new impetus to atomic power programs, which have the unfortunate by-product of making such nuclear weapons materials as plutonium available in vast quantities in many parts of the world. This new availability increases drastically the opportunities for additional nations to acquire nuclear weapons and for such explosives to fall into the hands of terrorist or dissident groups. Nuclear blackmail could become a common event in five to ten years. Nevertheless, our government has continued to promote the sales of nuclear materials and technology even in such areas as the inflammable Middle East, using as an excuse that if we don't, others will. The place of nuclear power in satisfying the world's energy needs must be carefully reevaluated in light of all the risks of this technology.

The next President must face the nuclear issue squarely, or there may never be a next President after him. ¶He must call a halt to the never ending increases in our nuclear weapons stockpiles. ¶He must stop the development of new nuclear weapons systems, which only increase the likelihood of starting a nuclear war. ¶He must negotiate with the Russians to reduce the numbers of strategic delivery vehicles from their present already excessive overkill levels. ¶He must negotiate seriously with the USSR, and as many other nations as will join, a comprehensive ban on all nuclear testing, and in the interim halt all U.S. testing for as long as the Russians follow suit. ¶He must reduce the numbers of nuclear weapons overseas and immediately withdraw all such weapons from forward locations in Europe and Korea. ¶He must stop threatening to initiate the use of nuclear weapons as a means of demonstrating our resolve. Instead, he should make it clear that our policy is to reserve such weapons for deterrence against nuclear attack by any other nation and demonstrate our intent to deal with nonnuclear aggression by political or conventional military means. ¶He must review our commitment to nuclear power as a source of energy and support such programs only when the risks of nuclear proliferation have been considered realistically. ¶He must withhold nuclear assistance to other nations that have not agreed either to renounce nuclear weapons or to accept the international safeguards on all their nuclear materials. ¶And he should make the United States the world leader, not the laggard, in reducing the risks that nuclear weapons will become more generally available and in lowering the danger that civilization will be destroyed in a nuclear Armageddon.

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