PROLOGUE

This third volume of my three-part memoir Monk’s Tale appears seven years after volume 1, The Pilgrimage Begins, 1941–1975, and five years after volume 2, Way Stations on the Journey. The primary reason for the longer time period to complete volume 3 is that I began the process by writing almost a thousand pages about my presidential years for the university archives. Later I sifted through that material to produce a work that is much shorter in length and, I hope, more interesting to the reader.

Volume 1 started at the beginning, with my family roots, educational history, vocational discernment, and ministerial and academic preparations. Volume 2 covered my years as a professor of theology at Notre Dame, the succession of administrative responsibilities that I exercised, my years of residence in Sorin Hall, the range of my extracurricular involvements, the process by which I was elected as Notre Dame’s sixteenth president, and how I spent the time between my election in November and my formal assumption of that office on July 1. Volume 2 also described in some detail several of the outside boards I served on (or chaired) during my vice presidential and presidential years, as well as the period of more than ten years during which I participated in the Ex Corde Ecclesiae consultative process. By including that material in Volume 2, I intended to have a clearer, less cluttered focus in this final volume.

Volume 3 is basically chronological and has eighteen chapters, one for each year of my presidency. The chapters vary in length, depending on the particular challenges and opportunities that we faced as an institution in a given year, and also on my own personal schedule of activities, both on and off campus.
In Chapter 1 I lay out the typical annual structure of my life and work. I usually participated in many recurring student- and alumni-focused events, such as orientation, home football weekends, Junior Parents Weekend, commencements, and Alumni Reunion Weekends. There were also many other less public but still regular events: meetings with the board of trustees, the Academic Council, the Alumni Board, and other such representative bodies. I will not mention many of those regular meetings and events in subsequent chapters because I presume that by then the reader will already be familiar with my normal routines, and also with my efforts to find a comfortable balance among my varied roles as president, professor, writer, liturgical leader, pastor, Holy Cross community member, and public speaker. As a result, for those later years I usually include short updates and a range of stories and commentaries that are particularly noteworthy in my memory.

I was often engaged in long-term matters that took up my attention over the course of some years, including my membership on various boards and my involvement in projects such as Notre Dame’s Tantur Ecumenical Institute in the Holy Land and the founding of the University of Notre Dame Australia. Some of these activities I covered in sufficient detail in volume 2. Other activities took place primarily during my presidency and are covered here. Of course I will not relate every relevant board meeting or overseas trip chronologically in an annual rundown, but will instead provide summary accounts at appropriate points, pausing in the basic year-by-year account. In this way the reader will be able to understand these long-term stories as a whole, as they developed across several years, rather than trying to understand them piecemeal as they happened. Similarly, I want to give the reader of this volume some insights into the more important overarching themes of my life and my administration, and those insights would be difficult to convey and be fully appreciated in a purely chronological account. Among these themes are my life as a priest of Holy Cross, athletics at Notre Dame, and our efforts
at being a good neighbor to the local South Bend community. Again, I will pause at appropriate points in the narrative to consider these topics more thematically than chronologically.

Because my term of office as president began on July 1, and because commencement (and Alumni Reunion Weekend close on its heels) always communicates a powerful sense of final accomplishment and closure in the life of a university, it seemed appropriate to begin each chapter with July 1, considering first the activities of the summer, then moving into the beginning of fall semester and then keeping a typical university schedule in mind.

As a public figure, I have had to choose carefully what to include and what to exclude in this volume on my Notre Dame presidency. I’ve tried to be truthful without being hurtful. I’m well aware that, in a large, complex institution, there can be (and are) multiple interpretations of the events I have described. In the end, I hope that my love for Notre Dame and its people comes through clearly, along with my overwhelming sense of gratitude for having been given the opportunity to lead this great university for eighteen years. I believe that the future for Notre Dame is bright and promising. All of us, indeed, stand on the shoulders of giants.
In the circumstances of my birth and upbringing, there was little to suggest that I might someday be elected to lead a great Catholic university. I was fortunate to have had loving parents who believed deeply in the value of education and personal formation. They continually encouraged me to set high goals for myself and to seek to make a difference in the world by using my God-given talents.

As I grew older, I discovered more about my personal strengths and weaknesses. I was an inveterate reader, and I came to enjoy learning. I prospered in the context of Catholic primary and secondary education. I was tall for my age and sufficiently gifted athletically to succeed in multiple sports, but particularly in basketball, which fortunately became my route to Notre Dame. I was always seen by my peers as a leader, and with the encouragement of my academic and extracurricular mentors I developed a richness of experience in student organizations, where one level of responsibility led to another.
By the time I graduated from Notre Dame, I had been to Latin America on several social service projects, and I had defined multiple areas of academic interest. I had discovered a vocation to become a priest in the Congregation of Holy Cross and I had begun to pursue formation in ministry and in graduate education. By the time of my ordination to the priesthood, I felt called to pursue doctoral work in theology at Vanderbilt University in order to prepare myself for service in my C.S.C. community’s apostolate of higher education at Notre Dame.

When I returned to campus with my doctorate, I became deeply involved in Notre Dame and its mission. I began teaching in the theology department and later assumed multiple administrative responsibilities within that department. I also served as director of the C.S.C. college seminary, as a member of the governing board of my religious community, and as a volunteer in a variety of other capacities with not-for-profit groups at the local, state, and national levels. Eventually I began what became several decades of life in Sorin Hall, a male undergraduate dormitory. I also began publishing articles and books and taking an active role in academic societies in my field. Finally, I continued traveling internationally, beyond Latin America to Europe and the Middle East.

In 1982 the board of trustees of Notre Dame elected me as a vice president and associate provost, and indicated that I was one of the four Holy Cross candidates who would be considered when choosing a successor to Father Ted Hesburgh, C.S.C., when he stepped down in 1987. During my vice presidential years, I had to adjust to a new set of expectations and responsibilities, while still preserving as much as I could of my life as an academician, pastor, and Holy Cross community member.

In November 1987, when I was formally elected president, I felt honored, excited, committed, and confident all at the same time. I would be taking over for a living legend. Father Ted was universally recognized as one of the great leaders of American higher education in his generation and a real force for good in
many other areas of endeavor. Yet the greatest compliment that I could pay to him would be to build on the outstanding legacy that he was leaving behind.

As I contemplated my transition into the presidency, I made a number of fundamental decisions. One of my goals was to maintain a healthy balance in my life—as much as I possibly could—while at the same time giving myself wholeheartedly to the demands and expectations of my new role. I was forty-six years old, in reasonably good health, full of energy and enthusiasm. Nevertheless, I knew that I needed to work out an appropriate structure for my days, weeks, months, and years.

I decided not to teach any classes during my first year as president. Instead, I wanted to observe my new patterns of activity and then decide what was the most viable time and day of the week for me to return to the classroom in my second year. I also decided to maintain my residence on the first floor of Sorin Hall. A number of the trustees were deeply skeptical when they heard about this particular decision; to them, living in an undergraduate dorm was a rather foolish notion. They imagined that I would be constantly overwhelmed with visitors, or never able to get to sleep at a reasonable time, or too accessible to the occasional crackpot or chronic critic of Notre Dame’s leadership. But, based on my prior experience, I expected my fellow Sorinites to be proud of having the president living among them, but also respectful of my need for privacy and relative quiet. And, except for rare episodes, my years in Sorin have gone smoothly and enjoyably.

One constant in my life has been my basic identity as a priest of the Congregation of Holy Cross. I’ll say more about my community later, but at this point I want to emphasize that being a Holy Cross member in any given apostolic setting means, whenever possible, living in common in several basic ways, at least to the extent of sharing prayer, meals, and financial resources. My decision as I took on the role of president was to be as faithful as I could to Holy Cross common life on the Notre Dame campus by giving a high priority to our two big community nights (Wednesdays and
Sundays), by concelebrating at community funerals, final vows, and ordination ceremonies, and by making a special effort to be with my C.S.C. brothers whenever legitimate reasons did not take me away. One of the nicest compliments I received when I stepped down as president was that it had been noticed that I was a “good community person.”

Another decision I had to make was how much to focus on Sorin Hall with regard to my weekly liturgical schedule. As a vice president I had already begun getting out to the other dorms occasionally for Sunday night mass, but as president I chose to attempt to get to every dorm at least once during the academic year, as well as to some of the masses held for graduate students. One of my greatest joys as president was being afforded the opportunity to lead the liturgies at university-wide events.

Right from the first year I moved into Sorin Hall, I had established the tradition of Monk Hoops—playing basketball with the students twice a week, on Monday and Wednesday nights at 10:30 p.m. in the Moreau Seminary gym across the lake. I enjoyed the games, and they became a great way to get to know the students. They also gave me just the excuse I needed to guarantee some amount of exercise in an organized fashion at least twice a week. Once I became president, my travels sometimes prevented my participation, but the students continued on without me. The harder question was what to do for exercise on the other days of the week. Through the years, the answers varied: from running around the lakes, to jogging, to walking (at my usual fast pace). Whenever I traveled to big cities, I always tried to walk to as many events as I could. I always enjoyed sightseeing, so I used that as a way to get up and around.

I competed in Monk Hoops for the first eleven years of my presidency. Then I discovered that I had developed tendinitis in both shoulders and I had lost my ability to be an effective shooter. From that time on, I concentrated on jogging and, later, walking on a daily basis whenever possible.
I quickly discovered that most of the relatively sane leaders whom I got to know had created some form of personal escape from the pressures of their jobs. Some liked to golf or garden, others collected things like fine art, coins, or ceremonial medallions. For me, reading, movies, and theater have been my prime focus of creative interest. I normally limit my TV watching to sports, weather, and a few minutes of evening news while channel surfing. With regard to sports on television, I have the greatest interest in college and professional football and basketball, and the summer and winter Olympic Games. Perhaps my most characteristic form of personal escape was—and still is—doing crossword puzzles, especially the more challenging ones like those in the *New York Times*. It is, for me, a way to zone out and to relax at the same time.

By the time I began my presidency in 1987, I had become comfortable taking a one- to two-week vacation in the summer with my family and otherwise deriving breaks from usual routines through the variations in the academic calendar. I always thought it was crazy when a type-A corporate leader would claim that he or she never felt the need to get away from the job. I considered that to be the best path to an ulcer, a mental or emotional breakdown, or a short life. During my years as president, I was faithful to an annual vacation and always returned refreshed and ready for action.

**The Transition**

Technically my first term as president of Notre Dame began July 1, 1987, but in the first week of June I already had a full agenda laid out for me, even as I adjusted from jet lag after a trip to China and Tibet. (Later I will describe in more detail my exploration of higher education opportunities in Asia.) The gala inauguration ceremonies were planned for September, and they would bring a festive note to the transition. But in the beginning it seemed more