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S-1 11/26/69



Agnewsticism New Cult In Nixon Inner Circle

WASHINGTON — The big new cult in Washington now is Agnewsticism. To be in the inner, inner circle of the administration, you have to be an Agnewstic, which is defined as one who disbelieves anything printed or broadcast east of the Ohio River. It is a modern adaptation of the ancient Greek word "gnostic"—meaning know-it-all: i.e. Walter Cronkite—and also from "agnostic," the doctrine that neither the existence nor the nature of God, nor the ultimate origin of the universe, is known or knowable. Thus: Agnewsticism (Ag-nus-ti-sizm), N. 1. The doctrine that truth is safer in the hands of politicians than of television commentators or newspaper columnists. 2. Any doctrine which affirms that vast power in the possession of any small group of men, particularly in New York or Washington, is dangerous and should be watched and criticized. 3. A theory that patriots back the government in war, even if they think it is wrong. 4. In some minds, a symbol of pressure by politicians to cover their blunders and muffle their critics.

The cult of Agnewsticism was named for Spiro Theodore Agnew, the Vice-President of the United States, which is to say, the president in charge of stamping out vice. In the autumn of 1969 he discovered a "small and unelected elite" who decided every night in New York what 40 or 50 million Americans should hear and see on the television networks.

Among these city slickers or "effete snobs" were the aforementioned Cronkite from St. Joseph, Mo., David Brinkley of Wilmington, N. C., Chester Huntley of Cardwell, Mont., Howard K. Smith of Ferriday, La., Eric Sevareid of Velva, N. D., and others from "big cities," most of whom analyzed the news

from left of center.

Agnew argued that commentators ought to reflect majority opinion rather than their own best judgment, and at least, that the other, or Agnewstic side, ought to have a wider hearing. At that moment, the cult of Agnewsticism was born.

Its members are a large and divergent company: People who have some grievance against television, which includes almost everybody; listeners who just don't understand how a few commentators and columnists can be so darn smart about so many things on such short notice; haters of singing commercials; card-carrying Republicans who just naturally chase commentators, as dogs chase cats.

Other Agnewstics are moderate people who simply think the critics are giving the President a hard time when he's in trouble; American Legionnaires, who think most liberal commentators are soft-boiled eggs; and even some people who think "the small group of men" who are directing the war are less of a menace than the other "small group of men" in television and newspapers who are passing judgment on it.

This is not a fable, and it is not entirely a joke. Agnew created a cult and dealing with the violent Agnewstics will not be easy.

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