

Repentance and Justice

There was a time when small boys wanted to be policemen when they grew up. But these days any youngster capable of reading headlines or watching the television news must have discovered that the path to fame, fortune and applause is in being a confessed public malefactor.

Former Vice President Spiro Agnew, who resigned after pleading no contest to charges of income tax evasion, received a standing ovation the first time he appeared in public after getting a suspended sentence. Meanwhile, he has been able to sell a novel at a hefty price.

Last week, Richard Kleindienst, the former attorney general and chief legal officer of the United States, pleaded guilty to refusing to testify "accurately and fully" to a Senate committee about his role in an anti-trust case. He, too, got a suspended sentence, along with effusive praise from the judge. Kleindienst modestly accepted the tribute. He won't even be disparaged.

The Watergate scenario is getting repetitive. The defendants go before a grand jury or a congressional investigating committee or a judge and pi-ously tell all (sort of). They are contrite; they proclaim the error of their ways, and they are eager, or so they say, to go straight. The curtain falls as they get off with a light sentence, or a suspended one, accompanied by lavish appreciation of their belated but elaborate penitence.

After that, they are free to start writing their books about Watergate, to tour the lecture circuit, to appear on television network shows and engage in all the remunerative and rewarding activities of national celebrities. They don't all get standing ovations, but restaurants are glad to give them good tables.

It is not yet known just what punishment or testimonial Charles Colson will get, for the former White House



"Kleindienst got a suspended sentence and effusive praise."

By James K. W. Atherton—The Washington Post

special counsel will not be sentenced until June 21. Meanwhile, after pleading guilty to obstructing justice and trying to interfere in the Ellsberg trial, Colson has been excused from prosecution on all other charges, accompanied by drooling senatorial blessings for his having "come to Christ."

It is one of the great "awakenings" of the year, rivaling that of Job Magruder, another prominent Watergate re-ponder, whose testimony before the Senate investigating committee left the members without a dry eye. "I have seen a lot of atonement going on," said Sen. Lowell Weicker (R-Conn.), "but I do not think anybody re-

ally put their finger on the problem with a sincere feeling as you did."

Magruder, who could have been sent to prison for five years, later got off with a 10-month sentence. In that time he can write a book on his prison experiences to match the best seller he has just published about the Watergate scandals.

As Magruder went into jail, his old pal, Herbert Porter, came out after serving 27 days of a 30-day sentence for lying to the FBI about the illegal disposition of Nixon campaign funds. He could have been given five years in prison, plus a \$10,000 fine. He, too, won the hearts of the Ervin committee by confessing his sins. He told the sena-

tors he was "positive down to his toes" that he "will never get into trouble again."

In view of all this, it would seem to be clear that Mr. Nixon, if need be, could as a last resort beat the rap by resigning, repenting, telling all and, with the help of Billy Graham, finding God.

Considering the Senate's reaction to the other confessed sinners, it no doubt would give the President the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Moreover, now that U.S. District Judge George L. Hart Jr. has established a new legal justification for perjury, there is little to fear from a little lying under oath. It was Judge Hart who let Kleindienst off with a sentence of 30 days and a \$100 fine, both suspended. He could have given the defendant a year in prison and a \$1,000 fine.

In falsely telling the Senate that Mr. Nixon had not given him orders in the ITT antitrust case, Kleindienst, Judge Hart said, was motivated by "a heart that is too loyal and considerate of the feelings of others," obviously meaning Mr. Nixon.

Had Kleindienst "answered accurately and fully the questions put in this case," Judge Hart explained, "it would have reflected great credit on this defendant but would have reflected discredit upon another individual." Like Kleindienst's boss. That, of course, has been the standard defense of other Watergate defendants, including former Atty. Gen. John Mitchell, who felt that any Nixon wish should be his command, legal or not.

Judge Hart climaxed his ode to Kleindienst by saying that he "still is universally respected and admired." Universally? Apparently the judge overlooked the assistant prosecutor who handled the Kleindienst case for special prosecutor Leon Jaworski. The prosecutor resigned in protest when Jaworski let the former attorney general plead guilty to a misdemeanor instead of a felony.