



Kevin P. Phillips

'The Swinging Celibate'

THE NIXON WHITE HOUSE has signed on a sex expert. Not, I hasten to add, because the crew-cut burghers who run the place have sublimated problems.

Actually, Father John McLaughlin — yes, *Father* (he's a Jesuit priest)—has been hired as a White House speechwriter. He has good literary credentials, having formerly been associate editor of the Jesuit magazine *America*. Moreover, he has a political background of sorts as last year's unsuccessful Republican candidate against Rhode Island's Sen. John Pastore. And several top White House and Republican National Committee officials strongly advocated

the precedent-breaking appointment—no priest has ever before held a White House job—as a way of wooing the crucial Catholic vote for 1972.

The most intriguing thing about Father McLaughlin, however, is his pre-occupation with sex. Last year, he observed that there had long been "a near obsession among the clergy with sexual offenses," but he seems pretty keen on the subject matter himself. Before the political bug bit him, he lectured widely—and enthusiastically—on the topic. According to one of his 1969 brochures, his available repertoire included the following sex lectures:

Intimacy Before Marriage and the Swedish Experience (one two, three or four parts); Intimacy Outeside Marriage; In-School Sex Education in the Seventies.

Testimonials a b o u n d. Chaplain Ronald Rafferty of the University of Connecticut says: "Father McLaughlin knows more about the Playboy ethic than most dedicated playboys."

Newly ensconced in the White House-abutting Executive Office Building, Father McLaughlin usually sheds his Roman collar for mod c l o t h e s: double-breasted suits and wide, wide ties. Staffers have nicknamed him "The Swinging Celibate."

He shuns the parish priest image. In 1970, he bluntly stated, "I've never been in a parish, you know—I've been a lecturer, teacher and writer." Saying that his priesthood is in his soul, McLaughlin has dismissed his collar as "a one-inch piece of plastic." He is now frequently using the title "doctor" instead of "Father."

Father McLaughlin is also a most "unusual Republican. Which is to say that until 1970, he wasn't one at all. Aware that he had no future with Rhode Island Democrats, he switched parties to run against Sen. John O. Pastore. During the campaign, he opposed President Nixon on the ABM and Vietnam issues—and attacked

Senator Pastore for intermittent support of the President on these issues. Father McLaughlin also took the coy stand that although he agreed with the Catholic Church's position on issues like birth control, pronography and abortion, he would not feel obliged to back these views as a public official.

THE 43-YEAR-OLD Jesuit was beaten two-to-one, and it is hard to see how the White House owes him a political debt. And it is also difficult to fathom why Mr. Nixon's advisers believe that the McLaughlin appointment will help them appeal to the nation's Catholic electorate.

According to White House aides, the prospect of Father McLaughlin being the first Roman Catholic priest on the White House staff drew expressions of surprise and opposition from four Catholic cardinals, including Cardinal Cooke of New York and Cardinal Cody of Chicago. During the 1970 campaign, the Bishop of Providence, Rhode Island, the Most Reverend Russell J. McVinney, publicly criticized Father McLaughlin for violating Canon Law by running for office without his permission. Catholic lay groups in Rhode Island have been decidedly cool to the controversial Jesuit.

By his efforts in the fields of federal aid to parochial schools and suppression of pornography, President Nixon has won—and deserves—considerable praise from Catholic organizations and from the Catholic press. Father McLaughlin's appointment is unlikely to add to these laurels.

One of the President's greatest dangers seems to be poor high-level staff advice on the economy, on desegregation, and now on personnel. It is impossible to imagine the President himself approving, as the first priest on the White House staff, a sex lecturer who is apparently persona non grata with key leaders of the U.S. Roman Catholic hierarchy.