

Priest Says Nixon Is a Moral Man

Washington

A Jesuit priest on the White House staff said yesterday that suggestions that President Nixon's Watergate tapes disclose a degree of immorality are "erroneous, unjust and contain elements of hypocrisy."

The Rev. John McLaughlin made his comments at a news conference arranged by White House communications director Ken Clawson apparently in an attempt to counter rising criticism after transcripts of White

House conversations were released.

Senate Republican leader Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania said Tuesday that the transcripts reveal a "deplorable, shabby, disgusting and immoral performance . . . by each of those" who participated in the discussions. A cross-section of religious leaders and ethics specialists said the edited conversations reflect a contempt for fairness and truth.

Father McLaughlin, whose

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THE REV. JOHN McLAUGHLIN, A JESUIT
He is a deputy special assistant to the President

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official title is deputy special assistant to the president, writes speeches and makes numerous public appearances on behalf of Mr. Nixon.

He obtained his doctorate at Columbia University. Before joining the White House staff, he served as associate editor of the "Journal of Opinion America" and ran unsuccessfully in 1970 as a Republican candidate for the U.S. Senate from Rhode Island.

Father McLaughlin said his comments were not aimed directly at Scott, whom he described as a venerable and revered figure in American politics.

He said that to criticize Mr. Nixon on moral grounds is "unjust . . . and politically tendentious" because, he contended, Mr. Nixon's role in seeking world peace shows he is a man of great moral leadership.

Father McLaughlin, who has served as a presidential adviser and spokesman for more than two years, told newsmen that in the Biblical view of St. Paul morality is charity and Mr. Nixon is a moral man.

"I think the remarks about the President's conversations that conclude that they are immoral and amoral are erroneous, unjust and contain elements of hypocrisy," Father McLaughlin said. He added that he thought the President "acquitted himself with honor."

"The President is not a god living on Mt. Olympus," he said. "He is a human being with human imperfections like you and I."

The profanity deleted from the transcripts of Mr. Nixon's conversations

should be viewed as "a form of emotional drainage . . . a he opposed the original reform of therapy, a form of release," said Father McLaughlin.

Questioned about Mr. Nixon's consideration of the payment of hush money to Watergate defendants, Father McLaughlin said the transcripts show that Mr. Nixon never authorized any such payments.

He said the President's discussion of the matter with since-fired White House counsel John W. Dean III was part of a chief executive's right to "reasonably entertain all . . . options" in considering problems.

The presidential aide said he agreed "the presidency has been enfeebled" by the continuing controversy but said: "I cannot contemplate any set of circumstances where President Nixon would resign."

* Father McLaughlin said he agreed to the release of tapes to the Watergate grand juries because he knew it would lead to continuing demands for access to presidential files. "It's like losing your virginity," he said, "The next time is a little easier."

Among other religious leaders' comments, the Rt. Rev. John E. Hines, presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, said the tapes "reveal an amoral man, insensitive to the principles that are so important to firm, fair and ethically oriented government."

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, said the tapes are "not the language of the presidency, but the language of the gutter. It reeks with the stench of moral decay."

A.P. & U.P.